

Prevailing Misconceptions and Grassroots Participation in Community Development Programmes in Eberi/Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State

Kingsley ALOZIE

Metropolitan Demonstration Schools
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
St. John's Campus, Port Harcourt.
aloziekingsley@ymail.com

Abstract

The Study examined Prevailing Misconceptions and Grassroots Participation in Community Development Programs in Eberi/Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State. The population for the study comprised 480 executive members of the community administration institutions – Town Union, Women Association, Youth Association, CDC and the Traditional Rulers Council in the twenty four communities that make up the LGA spread in three clans. A multi-stage sample procedure was adopted, involving the random sampling technique which was used in selecting three communities from each of the three clans in the LGA. The second stage involved a purposive sampling of the Chairmen, Secretaries, Public Relation Officers and Treasurers of the community administration institutions – Town Union, Women Association, Youth Association, CDC and the Traditional Rulers Council. This was used to realize a sample size of 200. Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion were adopted as instruments for data collection. The reliability coefficient is 0.67. Three research questions were posed. They were analyzed with frequencies and weighted means. The study revealed that the grassroots have a negative perception of what constitutes CD and the objectives of its programs. It also revealed that grassroots participation in CD activities has been very low. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended amongst others the need to engage qualified adult educators and community development workers in our rural communities so as to create the desired awareness to change the peoples' perception of development and CD. Community members should be carried along at all levels of CD projects and programs – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and these programs should be co-coordinated by competent CD officers.

Keywords: Misconceptions, Grassroots, Participation and Community Development.

INTRODUCTION

Development as a concept is not very easy to define. It means different things to different people sometimes depending on their disciplines or professions (Kobani & Alozie, 2015). Against this backdrop, Onyeozu (2007) stressed that development should be perceived as a multi-dimensional process which involves the reorganization and reorientation of the entire social, economic and cultural systems. Added to improvements in incomes and outputs, it involves

radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, and sometimes, even customs and beliefs.

Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) noted that in defining development many words with similar meanings often come to mind. Such words include: social change, growth, evolution, advancement and modernization. They stressed that with the exception of social change; all others imply positive change in a specific direction. Thus, Balogun (2012) noted that development is concerned with change but it is not simply the same as change. He noted further that development is concerned with those progressive changes which are rooted in, and sprang out of previous situations. This means that development is not making everything new but a new emerging from the old.

Kobani and Alozie (2015) noted that development is of man rather than of infrastructures. Balogun (2012) agrees with this assertion when he said that the emphasis of development is on the people; as it is they who are thought to appreciate what constitute change. This view likely derives from the opinion of Nyerere (1978) who maintained that “Development is for man, by man and of man”. From similar standpoint, Kidd (1978) saw development as the power of the people to solve their own problems, using their own experience, thinking and resources with a view to bringing to an end their hitherto abnormal state of poverty and want.

The Noble Economist Amartya Sen writing in ‘Development as Freedom’ sees development as being concerned with improving the freedoms and capabilities of the disadvantaged, thereby enhancing the overall quality of life. Sen pursues the idea that development provides an opportunity for people to free themselves from the suffering caused by: early mortality, persecution, starvation and illiteracy (Kobani & Alozie, 2015).

Development should be about increasing political freedom, cultural and social freedom and not just about raising incomes. Anyanwu (1999) identified four areas which development is operational:

- Social change, in which new ideas are introduced into a social system to produce higher per capita incomes and levels of living;
- Man’s capacity to expand his own consciousness and, therefore, his power over himself, his environment and his society;
- The power of the people to solve their own problems, with their own wisdom, experiences and resources;
- The optimum realization of the well being of individuals in their community.

He noted that in all cases, the emphasis is on people, because it is they who are stimulated, motivated, helped or encouraged to adopt new methods, and to learn new skills, for their well-being.

After a critical examination of the scholastic views of development, I agree with the submission of Okoli (2011) who sees development as man-directed and propelled socio-economic and political transformations of self and entire structure of a given political system from a comparatively low to a remarkably improved form. These transformations have as their primary objective improvements of the living conditions and material standings of the citizenry. These subsequently improve man’s potentials and capabilities and eliminate and/or reduce poverty, penury, inequality, unemployment and, generally enhance the conditions for human existence.

Concept of Community Development

Although community development has its ancestry as a union of community organization and economic development, rural sociology, adult education and the extension movement, it is new as a discipline (Anyanwu, 1999). It was first mentioned internationally at the 1948 Cambridge Summer Conference. There it was agreed that the compound word 'community development' should be used in place of 'mass education' and defined as:

A movement designed to promote better living with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forth coming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to ensure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement.

Since then, the concept has attracted a lot of attention from other organizations, scholars and practitioners as evident in literature, who have defined the concept in various ways all of which, however, refer to similar and related development activities and situations. Notable among the organizations is The United Nations Organization (UNO) who in 1963 gave a definition that today enjoys wider acceptability. It defined community development as:

A process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities, to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of community, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress.

Community development is also defined as an educational method in which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities and integrate them into the life of the nation and enable them contribute fully to national progress (Onyeozu, 2007).

Similarly, Community Development Exchange (2013) sees community development as a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grass roots and deepening democracy. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and impositions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. It starts from the principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which, if used in creative ways, can be channeled into collective action to achieve the community's desired goals.

It needs be noted, however, that community development in contemporary times has gone beyond the traditional role of improving the social, economic and physical conditions of individuals to include improvement in their emotional and psychological dispositions. Based on this, community development can be defined as a process by which the people with or without external help take steps to improve on the social, economic and physical standards as well as the emotional and psychological dispositions of community members relying mostly on local initiative, leadership and resources.

Objectives of Community Development

The overriding objective of a community development programme is to improve the living standard of individuals in a community to the extent that the community's resources – human and material – can accommodate.

Apart from this, other objectives of community development include:

- To ensure that all aspects of community living are developed equitably so as to avoid imbalance or neglect in any area;
- To achieve increase in productivity and to raise the production potentials by stimulating the human and physical processes of change;
- To reduce poverty and unemployment in the communities;
- To enhance self-reliance and increase the economic viability of families;
- To explore and use technical assistance from outside the community; and
- To cooperate with and coordinate state and national development plans.

Community development aims at agricultural extension and development, rural industrial development, sanitation, disease control and health programmes, education, cooperatives, development of communication and other recreational activities.

Kobani and Alozie (2015) summarized the objectives of community development as follows:

- To educate and motivate the people for self- help;
- To develop responsible local leadership;
- To inculcate among the members of a community a sense of citizenship and spirit of civic consciousness;
- To introduce and strengthen democracy at the grass root level, through the creation and revitalization of institutions designed to serve as instruments for local participation;
- To initiate a self - generative and self sustaining and enduring process of growth;
- To enable people to establish and maintain co-operative and harmonious relationships; and
- To bring about gradual and self-chosen changes in the life of a community with minimum stress and disruption.

From the above, we can conclude that the main objective of community development is to bring out the best in individuals to meet personal and communal needs. However, I agree with Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) who noted that the dynamics of society has resulted to the expansion of the objectives of community development to include fight against ignorance, poverty, diseases, harmful and obnoxious cultural practices and social apathy among people regardless of age, sex, class or religion.

Concept of Participation

Onyeozu (2007) points out that the element of participation is a sine qua-non in Community Development. He noted that in any group activity which does not include an aspect of human participation by members of the group in its programme, cannot be regarded legitimately as community development. Emphasis is laid on mutual aid and the building of collaborative relationship and co-operation, as the relevance of mutual cooperation cannot be overemphasized in Community Development. As earlier mentioned, the development process of any nation needs the equal participation of everyone. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution, sub-section (a) of section 17, makes provision for this when it states that every citizen shall have equal opportunity of right, obligations and opportunities before the law. The World Bank's Learning Group on Participatory Development defines participation as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them (World Bank, 1996). Oakley (2001) asserted that popular participation can be interpreted along three broad lines:

- Participation as contribution, i.e. voluntary or other forms of input by rural people to predetermined programmes and projects;
- Participation as organization, either externally conceived or emerging as a result of the process of participation; and
- Participation as empowerment, enabling people to develop skills and abilities to become more self-reliant, and to make decisions and take actions essential to their development.

Participation in development projects and programmes is widely seen as both a means and an end. While many development agencies give equal weight to both, some emphasize one or the other aspect of participation (Rudqvist & Woodford-Berger, 2006).

As a means, participation is a process in which people and communities cooperate and collaborate in development projects and programmes (Clayton et al., 2008). As an end, participation is seen as the empowerment of individuals and communities in terms of acquiring skills, knowledge and experience, leading to greater self-reliance (Clayton et al., 2008). Participation is an instrument to break poor people's exclusion and lack of access to and control over resources needed to sustain and improve their lives. It is intended to empower them to take more control over their lives (Clayton et al., 2008).

Simmons in Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) regarded community participation as the ability to control and manage resources not only in a sustainable way, but also in a manner that meets people's social, cultural and economic needs. In this definition, community participation is perceived beyond getting people engaged in the decision making process alone, but also identifies other variables that can make it germane to the socio-cultural and economic needs of the community.

Participation means taking part in an activity. Participation in decision making process here refers to the right of the people to make some input with regard to projects being sited in their communities. People participate in local development everyday through their family life, livelihood activities and community responsibility. The degrees of control that men and women have over these activities vary. The same holds true for Community Development initiatives.

According to Bretty (2013) participation is an empowering process in which people, in partnership with each other and those able to assist them, identify problems and needs, mobilize resources, and assume responsibility to plan, manage, control and assess the individual and collective actions that they themselves decide upon. As a process of empowerment, participation is concerned with development of skills and abilities to enable the rural people to manage better, have a say in or negotiate with existing development systems (Oakley, 2001).

Participation emphasizes the initiative of the people as a means of stimulating the active involvement of all citizens in the community development activity. This implies that the resources needed for the success of the development programmes has to come from both the people themselves and from government authorities.

Onyeozu (2007) observed that participation in community development is concerned with the following:

- The involvement of people in cooperative projects for improvement of their living conditions.
- Involvement of people in activities for acquisition of skills that enable them adjust to changing realities.
- Involvement of people in public issues which grow out of individual or local interests.

Participation is all about the channeling of individual actions into collective forms. The desire of an individual for self-help action must be channeled into joint enterprise with others in the community. Through such joint enterprise the individual is helped in working and living co-operatively with other members of the community to realize common goals and to improve his welfare.

Elements of Participation

Osuji (1991) identified the elements of participation in general to include:

- Taking part in decision making to identify needs;
- Taking part in the mobilization of resources and planning of project to be undertaken;
- Taking part in the activities to implement and put the project in place; and
- Taking part in monitoring and evaluation of projects.

It is considered as participation if community members take part in any of the activities above. It needs to be noted that the initiators of the development programme may actually determine what area they would require the community members to participate. It is so because each programme has a particular objective to achieve. Thus, what constitutes participation may differ from project to project and from time to time, but participation most often has the general elements above. (Oyebamiji & Adekola, 2008)

The Problem

There has been a consensus of opinion by scholar that popular participation is essential for the success and sustainability of CD efforts. The above stresses the need for beneficiaries of CD

intervention efforts to actively participate in all stages of the program – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It has been argued that certain prevailing misconceptions of development and CD programs abound. This contention is borne out of the conclusion that participation will be more effective when from the outset the people have a clear conception and perception of what constitutes development, CD and its aims and objectives. However, when the people are predominantly ignorant or still harbor some misconceptions as to what constitutes development and CD, popular participation would hardly be achieved.

Thus, peoples' conception could be the major difference between successful CD programs and failed CD efforts. Against this backdrop the researcher saw the need to investigate the prevailing misconceptions of people on what constitutes development and CD, their conception of the objectives of these programs and if grass root participation in CD programs has been very effective.

Therefore, the need to ascertain the level of peoples' awareness of what development and CD involves as a first step towards eliminating the misconceptions to guarantee a more successful CD programs is the problem of the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What do the grass root people perceive as development and CD?
- What is the grass root people's perception of the objectives of CD programs and projects?
- Do the grass root people participate effectively in CD programs and projects?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised the executives members of Community Development Committees (CDCs) women associations, youth associations and traditional rulers council in all the twenty four communities in Eberi/Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State spread in the three clans of Umuogba/Umuajuloke, Eberi Obohia and Ofe Ohimoho. A multi- stage sample procedure was adopted. The first stage involved a stratified sampling of four communities from each of the three clans in the local government area as follows: Umuokomanu, Umuoyere, Umudike– Umuogba/Umuajuloke Clan; Umuobasi, Obehe, Dikeogbo – Eberi Obohia Clan; and Umueke, Amaji, Umuonya – Ofe Ohimoho Clan.

The second stage involved the purposive sampling of the Chairmen, Secretaries, Public Relation Officers, Treasurers of the Community Administration Institutions – Town Union, Women Association, Youth Association, CDC and the Traditional Rulers Council. This was used to determine the sample size of 200.

A questionnaire titled: Prevailing Misconceptions of CD Program Assessment Questionnaire (PMCDAQ) was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient is 0.67. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentages and weighted mean.

RESULTS

Table 1: Grass roots Perception of Development and Community Development (CD)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean (X)	Remark
1.	Good roads constitute CD.	84 (336)	68 (204)	36 (72)	12 (11)	200	3.12	Accepted
2.	Provision of maternities is development.	92 (368)	73 (219)	29 (58)	6 (6)	200	3.26	Accepted
3.	Availability of electricity is development	5 (20)	42 (126)	71 (142)	82 (82)	200	3.21	Accepted
4.	Out of school education is part of CD.	90 (360)	68 (204)	36 (72)	6 (6)	200	1.85	Rejected
5.	HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign and Roll Back Malaria Seminar are CD programs.	7 (28)	34 (102)	75 (150)	84 (82)	200	1.82	Rejected

Table 1 shows that the respondents accepted development to involve the construction of good roads, provision of maternities, and availability of electricity. Each of these items has a mean that is greater than the criterion mean – 2.50. (3.12, 3.26, and 3.21 respectively); while the options suggesting out of school education and HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign and Roll Back Malaria seminar were rejected by the respondents. Each of them has a mean that is less than 2.50 (1.85 and 1.82 respectively).

Table 2: Grass roots Perception of the Aims and Objectives of CD projects and Programs

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean (X)	Remark
6.	CD programs are set up to compensate party supporters with contracts.	68 (272)	59 (177)	47 (94)	26 (26)	200	2.85	Accepted
7.	Politicians embark on these projects principally to garner popularity for future elections.	72 (288)	63 (189)	49 (98)	16 (16)	200	2.95	Accepted
8.	CD projects and programs only serve to improve peoples' standard of living.	15 (60)	42 (126)	64 (128)	79 (79)	200	1.96	Rejected
9.	Community people own government projects sited in their communities.	15 (60)	52 (152)	60 (120)	73 (73)	200	2.04	Rejected

Table 2 shows the options that CD programs are set up to compensate party supporters with contracts and Politicians embark on these projects principally to garner popularity for future elections are accepted by the respondents. The items have means of 2.85 and 2.95 respectively that are greater than the criterion mean; while the options were rejected by the respondents. Their means of 1.96 and 2.04 respectively – is less than the criterion mean of 2.50.

Table 3: Peoples' Participation in CD Projects and Programs

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean (X)	Remark
10.	Members of the community are always part of a needs assessment process to determine projects to be embarked upon in the community	6 (36)	33 (99)	76 (152)	85 (85)	200	1.86	Rejected
11.	Members of the community always participate in the planning of CD projects	5 (20)	42 (126)	71 (142)	82 (82)	200	1.85	Rejected
12.	Community members always participate in the implementation of CD projects	11 (44)	36 (108)	68 (136)	84 (84)	200	1.86	Rejected
13.	Community members take part in monitoring and evaluation of CD projects.	15 (60)	48 (164)	64 (128)	73 (73)	200	2.13	Rejected

Table 3 shows that the options indicating that members of the community are always part of a needs assessment process to determine projects to be embarked upon in the community, members of the community always participate in the planning of CD projects, community members always participate in the implementation of CD projects and that community members take part in monitoring and evaluation of CD projects were rejected by the respondents. Each of their means of 1.86, 1.85, 1.86 and 2.13 respectively is less than 2.50 – the criterion.

Findings from Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus Group discussions were organized in five (5), one from each clan. In each of these communities ten persons who included the executive members of the community administration institutions were purposively sample and used for the FGDs.

The researcher tried to steer up reaction from the discussants on pertinent issues concerning their perception of development and the extent to which the people are engaged in CD activities and programs. In the course of the discussion, the discussants identified mostly in fracture and tangible projects such as roads, electricity, health centers schools as development not many of them agreed that HIV/AIDS Awareness campaign or out of school education such as: apprenticeship scheme, actually constitute development .To many of them, government has the sole responsibility of providing development while the people remain passive recipients of the development initiatives. The discussants also believed that projects are sited by government as a form of patronage to party faithful's, One tried to support the argument by stressing that the school building in their area was awarded by a close relation of a popular politician who hails from the area and noted that he decides who gets what in terms of these contracts. This appears to be the trend as the discussants observed that each area has a political king who controls contracts and other forms of government patronage in that area. A discussant cited the example of an empowerment grant being undertaken by the state government, He stressed that the main motive behind these actions was politics, to compensate party faithful's and garner support for future elections.

The discussants also revealed that the communities do not feel a sense of ownership of the government projects located in their areas. Many observed that the community was not involved during the award of contract and were not involved during the execution of the contract

and wondered how the project could turn out to be their own. They felt it was not also their responsibility to protect the projects from vandalization.

This led to the discussion on the extent of their participation in CD projects. The discussants noted that their participation in CD projects has been very low. They blamed the situation on the fact that the community people were not consulted, neither have they been effectively mobilized to participate in these activities. Many of the discussants, surprisingly, did not see the need for communities to engage in self help efforts to provide amenities such as roads, electricity, health centres, etc. They felt it was the responsibility of the government. The discussants also revealed that the community people have never been involved at any stage of the CD process – needs assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. On monitoring and evaluation, one of the discussants wondered why they should monitor and evaluate what is *ab initio* not theirs.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Results of the study showed that the respondents were mainly executive members of the community administration institutions. These people are usually regarded as opinion leaders in their various communities and as such should be in the best position to understand and express the true feelings and sentiments of the people in the issues within the scope of this study.

The findings revealed that the respondents do not have the proper perception of development and community development. They consider development as solely tangible items starting with goods and things: good roads, electricity, health centers, etc. They do not consider the non tangible items such as capacity building, awareness creation as development. In the light of this finding, the view of Onyeozu (2007) becomes very relevant. True development must mean the development of man; the unfolding and realization of his creative potential, enabling him to improve his material conditions and living, through the use of resources available to him. It is a process by which personality is enhanced; and it is that enhanced personality, creative, organized and disciplined – which is the driving force behind the socio-economic transformation of society.

It is clear that development does not start with goods and things; it starts with people-their orientation, organization and discipline. When the accent on development is on things, all human resources remain latent, untapped potential and a society can be poor amidst the most opulent material resources.

The findings also showed that the respondents also have a negative perception of what constitutes the aims and objectives for embarking on CD projects. They accuse government and politicians of using the projects for self gains and image laundering to garner popularity for future elections. The people do not feel a sense of ownership of these development projects sited in their areas and as such do not feel responsible for their protection against abuse, misuse and vandalization.

The reasons for the above may not be far- fetched, since as the study revealed, the people were not mobilized to participate in the project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This could be responsible for non sustainability of many projects in the communities. It is for this reason that World Bank (1996) stressed the need for participatory development – which they defined as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.

Participation is an instrument to break poor peoples' exclusion and lack of access to and control over resources needed to sustain and improve their lives. It is intended to empower them to take control over their lives (Clayton et al., 2008).

Recommendations

Based on the findings above the researcher made the following recommendations:

- There is the need to engage qualified adult educators and community development workers in our rural communities so as to create the desired awareness to change the peoples' perception of development and CD.
- Oil companies should include creation of awareness in communities on issues that bother on their socio-economic development as part of their social responsibility to host communities.
- There is the need for changes and reforms in terms of community management structures to widen the scope of participation in the affairs of the communities.
- Community members should be carried along at all levels of CD projects and programs – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and these programs should be co-ordinated by competent CD officers.
- NGOs should include community education and capacity building in their plans for local communities.
- The capacity of Community leadership should be strengthened to enable them cope with the challenges of leadership in a highly competitive era influenced by advancements in information technology.

REFERENCES

- Anyanwu, C. N. (1999). *Community Development: The Nigerian Perspective*, Ibadan: Gabesther Educational Publishers.
- Anyanwu, C. N. (1981). *Principles and Practice of Adult Education and Community Development*. Ibadan: Abiprint Publishing Company.
- Balogun, F.(2012). A Critical Analysis of the Concept of Andragogy as Applicable to Later Human Life. In M. A. L. Omole & A. Sarumi (Eds.), *50 Years of Adult Education at Ibadan*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Bretty, E. A. (2013). Participation and Accountability in Development Management. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 40 (2):1-29.
- Clayton, A; Oakley, P. and Pratt, B. (2008). *Empowering People: A Guide to Participation*. New York: UNDP.
- Community Development Exchange (2013). *Community Development*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdx.org.uk/commmunity-developmnet>.
- Kobani, D. and Alozie, K (2015). *Essentials of Community Development in Nigeria*, Owerri: Beauty Koncepts.
- Nyerere, J. K. (1978). *Development is for Man by Man, and of Man: The Declaration of Dar es Salaam*, B.L. Hall & J. R. Kidd (Eds.), *Adult Learning: A Design for Action*: Oxford: Pergamon Press.

- Oakley, P. (2001). *Projects with people: The Practice of participation in rural development*. International Labor Office. Geneva: Switzerland.
- Okoli, M. U. (2005). *Local Government Administration System: An Introductory and Comparative Approach*. Onitsha: Abbot Books.
- Onyeozu, A. M. (2007). *Understanding Community Development*. Port Harcourt. Davidstones Publishers.
- Osuji, E. E. (1991). *The Nature of the Community Ibadan*: Adult Education Department, UNIBAD.
- Oyebamiji, M. A., & Adekola, G. (2008). *Fundamentals of Community Development in Nigeria*. Port Harcourt. University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Rudqvist, A., & Woodford-Berger, P. (2006). *Evaluation and Participation -Some Lessons*, SIDA Studies in Evaluation 96/1, Stockholm: SIDA.
- World Bank (1996) *.World Bank Participation source book*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/sourcebook/sbintro.pdf>.