

Citizens' Participation and Governance in Nigeria

Essays in Memory
of
Professor Emmanuel Ejiogu Osuji



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Table of Content

1	Poverty, Democracy and Democratisation <i>Challenges for Political Education</i> <i>Emmanuel E Osuji</i>	1
2	Community Initiative to Community Development <i>The Experience of Barika Residents Association in</i> <i>Ibadan Northwest Local Government of Oyo State</i> <i>Rashid Aderinoye and Rasheedat Adeniji</i>	40
3	Laying the Correct Perspective for Conceptual Understanding of Sustainable Community Development <i>Ojokheta K O and Odusanya, Olatunbosun</i>	55
4	Community Development Policies and Programmes for Sustainable Rural Development in Nigeria <i>Olajide E O and Adaja Oluwaseyi Victor</i>	76
5	Capacity Building for Improved Community Development Participation of Citizens in Nigeria <i>Oyebamiji M A, Nwaiwu Nwabueze</i>	101
6	Social Media, Culture and Women Involvement in Community Economic Activities <i>Maria-M, David Ekpenyong</i>	130
7	Mobilisation for Democratic Governance in Nigeria <i>Adedokun N A</i>	147
8	Citizens Participation in Non-Governmental Organisation's Programmes for Social Welfare Services Delivery in Bayelsa State, Nigeria <i>Apuega R Arikawei</i>	165
9	Worker's Participation in Decision-making and Responsive Management <i>Akinyooye Funmilola</i>	190
10	Community Participation in Community Development in Nigeria <i>Abiona A I and Osu U C</i>	204

11	Democracy, Political Parties and Inclusionary Politics in Nigeria	223
	<i>Fibainmine G Paulley, Victory C Owede and Augustus A Adeyinka</i>	
12	Challenges of Citizens' Participation in Emerging Democratic Governance	251
	<i>Adekola Ganiyu</i>	
13	Awareness and Utilisation of Citizens' Participation on Good Governance in Nigeria	263
	<i>Olaleye Yemisi Lydia and Ayobade Adebowale</i>	
14	Executive Participation of Citizens in Governance	277
	<i>Adult Education and Empowerment of the Populace in Nigeria</i> <i>Comfort C Zuofa</i>	
15	Community Education	286
	<i>Strategies and Models</i> <i>Oyekunle Oyelami</i>	
16	Rural Policy Framework and Deficit of Democratic Values In Community Development Structure in Nigeria	305
	<i>Jonathan E Oghenekhowo and Olufunmilayo T. Iyunade</i>	
17	Enhancing Rural Development Through Community Education Programmes for Socio-Economic Change in Rivers State, Nigeria	313
	<i>Chidinma Dokubo</i>	
18	Encouraging Community Engagement as a Strategy to Curb Insecurity In Rivers State, Nigeria	326
	<i>Daerego Ilomabo Taylor</i>	
19	Citizen Participation	343
	<i>A Panacea for Good Governance in Nigeria</i> <i>Etighamo Esuefieni Jubilee</i>	
20	Social Capital and Community Participation in Nigeria	366
	<i>Chris Olusola Omoregie</i>	

10

Community Participation in Community Development in Nigeria

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Introduction

The paper examines community participation and development in Nigeria. It presents community participation as important for development in community development practice. The paper goes ahead to highlight concepts such as development, community participation, leadership and problems affecting community development in Nigeria. Lastly, the paper recommends the need for community involvement in decision making process for sustainability of development efforts.

Success in community development projects depends, to a large extent, on citizens participation and effective local leadership for sustainable community development. Community members should participate actively in programmes that are to improve their welfare. They are to give whole-hearted support to a programme which they initiate. The people in the community should take part in the identification of needs, planning, execution, utilisation and evaluation of programmes or projects. Participation brings about greater interest in community development programmes. It fosters sentimental attachment to the community and the programme, Osuji (1992) and Abiona (2009).

Local leadership is a key factor in community development and participation. If they are only interested in furthering their personal interest and also engaged in party politicking, it may impede participatory approach to development. They would find it difficult try to settle political scores and engage the community members to participate in development process. This will affect development in that the enthusiastic support and involvement of community members would not be forthcoming. Thus proper local leadership is a key factor in community participation and in the success of community-based development projects. This paper, therefore, examines community participation and development in Nigeria.

Community participation

The World Bank attaches a great importance to people's participation in the development process. Paul (1987), reports that 48% of the World Bank's project in the urban and rural areas included communities in their design as a way to increase project efficiency and sustainability.

Community participation has been long utilised in development projects nationally and internationally and demonstrated that people can devise their own way in providing community needs if they are allowed to make their own contributions (Abdulrauf and Kuyello 2015). The importance of people's participation has also been highlighted by UNDP in its Human Development Report (1998). The report acknowledges that a participatory approach to development, including the involvement of institutions/ NGOs is crucial to any strategy for successful human development. In the health sector, many international organisations and agencies, including UNICEF and World Health organisations (WHO), emphasises the importance of community involvement in health care as basic for improving health throughout the world (Rikkin, (1990).

In this wise, Abiona (2009) says participation of community members in community development creates a sense of belongingness, cohesion, solidarity, and also fosters societal values. It fosters sentimental attachment to the community and the programme. It creates the pride of ownership whereby people can refer to community projects as "ours". It brings cooperation and fellowship among individual members of the community who now believe in unity. They readily commit their human and material resources to the programme/project in which they are deeply involved. Citizens' participation creates self-fulfillment in the minds of community members. It brings about positive change through cooperative efforts of the people to solve problems.

The concept of participation has emerged as central ingredient in development in recent time. The belief is that the integration of the local people will provide effective means of mobilising available local

resources, energies, wisdom and creativity of people for development purposes (Omoruyi and Ehianu 2014). In his submission, Osuji (1992) views community participation in relation to development as involvement of members of project communities in all stages of decision making relating to development programmes in their communities.

This simply implies that development programmes should not be imposed on the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of development efforts. Osuji (1992), identified categories of community participation in development activities such as:

- taking part in decision making to identify community needs and listing them in order of priority.
- taking part in the mobilisation of resources and planning of projects to be undertaken in accordance with the identified needs.
- taking part in the activities to implement and put the projects in place.
- taking part in the monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Abiona (2009) further adds that even where programmes or projects are initiated by external donors (government, non-governmental agencies or philanthropists), the involvement of local people is important for their success. Programmes/projects provided for the local people would be neglected by them due to non-citizens' participation in their implementation. The programme might not even be the felt-needs of the people since they were not consulted.

The success of a programme for the welfare of the people depends on the participation of the people at all stages of implementation.

Mobilisation is crucial in citizens' participation. The people must be educated and mobilised to realise the potential human and material resources available within the community to solve their various problems. The people must not be satisfied with the prevailing state of problems and needs. Moreover, there should be a desire for change and improvement in

the community. The desire will lead to citizens' identification of solution to the problems. The desire for change will eventually make people to come around and actively participate in solving the problems, using local initiatives. They will design programmes aimed at finding solution to the prevailing problems.

Members of the community can be mobilised for participation because they realise a need for change and development. In the first instance, they will be dissatisfied with their present situation of living in the community. Hence, there is a desire for a change to bring about better living. This brings cooperative action whereby members develop a spirit of oneness towards solving the community problems. The spirit of oneness fires enthusiasm and initiates changes through local action. It brings about active participation in programmes aimed to solve community problem with or without government assistance. The community development agent can mobilise the people towards participation. It means that both the people and government can participate in the process of development. The people themselves should play a major role in the determination of programmes meant for their development.

The principle of citizens' participation fosters the culture of self- help in the community. It leads the people to cultivate interest in relying on their efforts to develop their community by themselves. Participation of the people includes involvement in the identification of projects or programmes to solve identified problem, planning of programmes to solve the problem, execution of the programme and monitoring and evaluation of the programme. Participation also includes readiness of the people to commit their resources to the development of the community.

Merits of participation

Osuji (1991), Okediran (1998), Oyebamiji (2000), Adetola (2004) and Abiona (2009) all remarked that there are derivable benefits from participation however, their views can be summarised as participation

give rise to acceptability of programmes initiated by government and non-governmental agencies through the people and for the people. Participation breeds improved design of projects/ programmes as planners and executors take advantage of local technology and knowledge in planning.

Citizen Participation and Sustainable Community Development

Sustainable community development needs citizens' interest in the project/ programme to ensure its sustainability. Members of the community should have interest in the programme that affects their welfare. Community members should participate actively in the programme that is to meet their needs. The people in the community should take part in identification of their needs, planning, and execution of programme, utilisation and evaluation. Thus, participation yields greater interest in sustainability. It brings about an attachment between the community members and the programme.

In citizens' participation, programmes that are initiated and provided by government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can only be sustained if the people that are beneficiaries are involved in the planning, execution and evaluation. In other words, the people should participate in the development process; otherwise the programme will not be sustained after the donor's withdrawal. Participation is beyond informing the communities about intervention without input from the people who are to benefit from the programme.

Another key element in sustainability of community development project/programme is that the programme should be according to the felt needs of the people. The programme should be people-oriented. The community members should determine their felt needs and not the outsiders imposing a programme on them. The programme imposed, which is the assumed need, cannot be sustained because it does not satisfy the immediate need of the people, moreover, the people to benefit from

the programme are not consulted. Therefore, people's priorities should be considered first in designing a project.

Sustainable development needs a great committed political action on the part of government. This is in terms of policies and grassroots advocacy. There are needs for stability of government and enduring and stable policies. It means that policies should be continuous and not changed whenever there is a change of government.

In Nigeria and developing world generally, sustainable community development can only succeed where there is transparency and accountability in all sectors. Many programmes have been poor in quality or abandoned midway due to corruption, embezzlement of funds, nepotism and other vices. It means the collective interest of the people and their needs should be foremost in the minds of the leaders and politicians. Transparency and accountability will make members of the community develop psychological interest in the mobilisation programmes of government towards self-help projects. Age groups, secret societies, women groups and others, that were relevant to development. Attention should be paid to these local associations which have been transformed since the colonial period for economic and development purposes. In sustainable community development, local institutions, which are relevant at the grassroots, especially in rural areas should be utilised. For example, the media of communication in rural areas might be slightly different from the urban centres.

Another important element is that the projects/programmes should have local relevance to community organisation. In traditional community organisation, there were leaders, and associations, such local channels of communication should be more relevant in that the people are used to certain patterns of life which modernisation might not have fully affected. A key element of sustainable development is an effective political system where good governance is upheld. This brings enduring democracy with people-oriented policies. Sustainable development requires a political

system that ensures citizens' participation in decision-making. Where there is stability in government, policies are implemented even when there is a change in administration.

Sustainable community developmental so hinges on good economic system that is able to withstand the test of time. It is capable to solve problems in the process of development. The idea is that if the economy of a nation has a strong base, it should best able and ready to meet the challenges of the present generation and at the same time make provision for the future generation. It is a system whereby the employment rate is high and the level of poverty is minimal. In Nigeria for example, there is over-dependence on oil production as the main source of revenue. However, the main source of survival in the rural areas, which is agriculture, is not well promoted.

The concept of self-help is paramount in sustainable community development. It is of importance to secure people's interest in the project of development and implementation. When a programme is initiated and planned by the people through self-help efforts, the people are more committed to the success and sustainability of the programme. There is a strong link between self-help and sustainability of projects. People participate for the sole reason that they have seen success achieved and have become enthusiastic enough to work towards achieving it for themselves. The self-help principle ensures the sustainability of existing projects and the plan for future development.

In Nigeria, however, more communities depend on government for development. In such an instance, there is no link between sustainability of projects provided by the government and the interest of the people. Projects provided by the government in many communities could not be sustained because there is no commitment on the part of the people. It is a "government project", not "our project". Hence, it is allowed to rot away while the beneficiaries feel unconcerned.

There should be equal access to resources for sustainability of community development. In many communities, lack of access to resources confines people to abject poverty. Thus, their livelihood and survival as a people depend on limited resources that they can muster to exist. In this case, there are often a class of wealthy people and another class of the poor. Women and children are the most vulnerable in such communities. Moreover, the inequalities make it possible for a group of powerful people to mismanage available resources and waste public fund.

In a situation where there is poverty, high unemployment, lack of access to basic needs of livelihood like Nigeria, it is difficult for people to team up for community development purposes. Where people attempt to come together, in most cases, many community members will not participate due to poverty and inability to contribute their share to the development of the community.

Political stability anchors development in any nation. This means that there should be smooth transition of government from one administration to another without violence. There should be equity and distributive justice at all levels. Also, of importance is prevalence and institutionalisation of human and democratic rights. These presuppose a political system that provides effective citizens' participation in decision-making process. Therefore, there should be continuity in policies of government of different administrations. In this instance, the atmosphere is favourable for sustainability of existing projects and plans for future development.

In Nigeria, changes in administration from the civilian to military on a number of occasions resulted in political instability and frequent changes of policies on the economy, development, education and other spheres. Such changed policies affected efforts geared towards sustainable community development. People develop apathy to programmes of development as they perceive those in power as adventurers seeking to loot the government coffers.

The outsiders' intervention in the process of development needs close examination. Non-governmental organisations have been playing important role in the process of community development in many local communities. Some of the NGOs work at local, national and international levels. NGOs can foster sustainable community development through popular participation of the people in decision-making, planning and action. Moreover, people's priorities should be considered in assisting the communities. The importance of involving the beneficiaries of NGOs' intervention in the process of decision-making, planning and action lies in the fact that when the donors withdraw their services from the community, the people will be able to sustain the programme by themselves. Thus, sustainable resource management depends on the ability of the local body to maintain the programme within their own values and resources.

Another outside intervention into sustainable community development is through foreign aid. Foreign aid is any flow of capital from developed countries to developing nations. Foreign aid should be non-commercial but there should be repayment terms. It is believed that foreign aid assists in transferring resources from wealthy to poor nations in order to encourage development and income redistribution. However, aid has been criticised on the ground that it perpetuates neo-colonial dependency relationship which will ensure that recipient nations remain underdeveloped (Mosley, 1995, Todaro, 1997).

Government agencies which are established by governmental decree, laws or edicts can also be referred to as outside intervention. In Nigeria for instance, there are some agencies such as the Directorate of Infrastructure, Rural Development (DIFFRI), National Employment Agency and others which are established to meet specific needs of the people. Such needs have been identified by the government and they are provided for as social service to the people. The problem with the agencies is that they do not have capacity to meet the demands of all the communities and citizens that have problems of their intervention. Secondly, the people

often believe that it is the duty of government to meet such needs; hence they do not participate in sustaining the projects or programmes provided by the agencies. Thirdly, the agencies do not involve the beneficiaries in decision-making, planning and action. Thus, there is no commitment on the part of the people to the sustainability of the projects.

Sustainability of community development projects or programmes can only succeed if the people are fully involved in decision-making, planning, action and evaluation. It is essential to create the interest of the people in the programme. When people are involved, it creates a sense of belonging and ensures lasting impact on their lives.

Justifications for community participation in development

Osuji (1993) itemises various justifications for community participation in development as below:

- The involvement of community members in development activities in their communities is likely to better results and decision. This is because their involvement in development process would play a vital part in bringing into public consciousness irrational and emotional but useful elements which may not have been considered in the rational planning process.
- Participation is very important as it helps empower communities in increasing their capacity to define, analyse and act on their own problems.
- Participation serves as a vehicle for psychological satisfaction, motivation and mobilisation. By being associated indecisions concerning their wellbeing, people are able to see that they have some control over their environment.
- The involvement of community people in their own development makes cost-sharing between the local population and outside agencies possible. Cost sharing is of particular importance to government

and other agencies involved in community development activities especially in the area of stringent economic policies and resources.

- The central objectives of involving local people in development programme is to enable them assume full responsibility for the programme or project at a later date. Although, their participation in action programme would encourage self-reliance.
- Involvement of community dwellers in development projects helps in articulating their needs and having better chances of being understood, accepted, supported and valued; and are better sustained and maintained by the community.

Problems of Community Development in Nigeria

According to Abiona (2009) many problems militate against the growth of community development in Nigeria. Some of the problems include the following:

Ignorance of the importance of community development principles

Most stakeholders in community development are ignorant of the community development principles. Without the knowledge, however, the prosecution of community development cannot be successful. The principles include; principle of self-help; principle of felt-need, principle of citizen participation; principle of self-growth and principle of self-reliance. The lack of adequate knowledge and practical application of the principles have led to slow pace of community development in many communities. Due to this ignorance, many communities depend on the elites and wealthy members of the community. They have not realised that everyone in the community should be involved and, not solely the rich should be responsible for community development.

Level of awareness on community development is low

Many communities still hold onto the belief that community development is the responsibility of the government in power. It is believed that government should provide all necessities to make life comfortable for the citizens. They refuse to acknowledge that people's contribution and participation are the best forms of community development. Even when amenities are provided in some communities, there is no effort on the part of such communities to sustain them because they believe that government should be responsible for the sustenance.

This results in under-development of many communities that have not taken up the challenges of self-help, self-reliance and citizen participation in community development. The governments are not capable of satisfying the needs of every community and therefore, communities should discard the belief that community development is the responsibility of governments.

Poverty of the masses hinders the development of communities

The level of poverty is rather high in many communities. Many are living below poverty level. There is high rate of unemployment, especially among the youth. In fostering development, most communities depend on government and non-governmental organisations for patronage. Where there is poverty, the people cannot participate actively in community development since they are struggling to survive. The excessive demands on the governments retard the pace of development in that government resources are limited and as such cannot be stretched beyond limit.

The political class discourages self-help and citizen participation

The political class contributes to the poor level of community development, over-dependence on government and poor attitude of people towards development. Comparatively, political class in advanced countries encourages citizens to participate in community development voluntarily. In Nigeria, provision of basic infrastructure that should be part of

community development is an issue during campaign for election. The politicians make empty promises to the people in order to secure their votes. They often promise to provide electricity, water, schools, and roads among others instead of educating the people on the need to embark on self-help development.

Lack of funds hinders community development

Many communities make efforts to embark on self-help programme but cannot implement such successfully because of limited funds. Such communities sometimes depend on grants from the government to supplement what they have contributed. However, the expected assistance from government might not be forth-coming or might come too late and is usually below the expectation of the communities. This often leads to abandonment of good projects midway. Moreover, many members of the communities might not fully cooperate to meet their financial obligations to the projects due to poverty or lack of interest in the said projects.

The importance of community development in national development is not fully appreciated

It was during the General Babangida's regime that more emphasis was placed on rural development. The policy makers do not stress the importance of community development as a catalyst for development through joint-government and citizen participation. They do not lay importance on rural development in their scheme of national development. Majority of Nigerians live in rural areas and more so, the mainstay of the Nigerian economy apart from oil production is derived from agriculture. The lack of enough attention on rural development leads to insufficient food production for the nation and so food items have to be imported.

Lack of transparency and rampant embezzlement of funds by leaders

The limited funds contributed by members of the communities may be embezzled by community leaders and others. This brings mistrust and

kills the interest of the community members who are willing to participate in community development. The political class makes the matter worse by displaying affluence after embezzling public funds. It is believed that such funds that could have been used for development are in the hands of politicians.

Problem of inadequate data and records

There is also the problem of inadequate data and records on socio-economic backgrounds of the people. Up till now, Nigeria cannot boast of accurate census that is generally accepted by all geo-political zones. It is therefore, difficult to identify and determine areas of needs that government should focus upon and communities that are adversely affected by lack of development. The result is uneven development in the nation and tribal sentiments in distribution of amenities. This hinders the planning process of development programmes. There are no accurate and adequate statistics to back up the national development and what to plan for.

Lack of contact between policy makers and practitioners on the field

Generally, there is lack of contact between policy makers and those engaged in community development in the field. There are no regular meetings or conferences to bring them together to discuss issues pertaining to community and grassroots development. On this account, many policy makers are not aware of the real situation on the ground. This often exposes the policy makers to make decisions based on ignorance of the needs and aspiration of the people in the local communities.

Lack of enough experts in community development:

Many community development agents are untrained and cannot successfully mobilise or educate communities for development. Community development is a professional discipline which demands specialised training for practitioners. Hence, an untrained officer cannot perform up

to expectation. Necessary data and information cannot be provided by untrained officers who have not been groomed for this purpose.

Identification of needs

The needs of individuals and communities vary. This problem often leads to conflict of interest between individuals and communities. This brings about identification of what constitutes assumed and felt-needs of the community. What is vital need to a community may not be considered so for another. This brings the problem of planning programmes of development by different tiers of government. It is often difficult to plan some projects for communities within the same local government area.

Recommendations

In view of the forgoing the following recommendations are made:

- There is the need for development experts and community development practitioners to create awareness on the importance of involving community members in development process as this would promote good governance in community development.
- There is the need for adequate information dissemination as this would facilitate participation.
- There is the need to train communities for development. Local communities often lack the basic skills to identify their needs in order of priority plan and implement development programmes.
- There should be appropriate institutional arrangement for managing development at the local level.

Conclusion

Community participation stresses the need for involvement of community members in activities which are designed to enhance the development of their community and better service delivery. In other words, to foster

accelerated and sustainable development the participatory approach should be adopted. The idea of community participation is deeply rooted in community development which enjoins that whatever is designed to improve the welfare of the people must seek to elicit the enthusiasm and total commitment of the people. If people are not involved and do not feel that the projects going on in their community are theirs, they are not likely to be interested and this would affect the success of such projects.

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