

Prevailing Misconceptions in Community Development Programmes: Case Study of Grassroots Participation in Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

People assume that development means quantitative growth, whereas its main characteristic is qualitative change. To develop is to grow, and to grow means becoming more complex and stronger. An Economist may see development as only an increase in wealth or income (absolute or per capita); an Engineer may see development as greater control over energy, or more sophisticated and powerful tools. When a community develops, it gets stronger and more complex. It undergoes social change. This Paper examines misconceptions about Development, Community and Community Development, types of development, and current trend of development in Nigeria, with special references to grassroots people in Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers State.

INTRODUCTION

In a world that is very rich, many people are very poor. Development is about reaching these people and helping them improve their lives. Indeed, development is a complex term that takes in many different ideas. But most simply, development, means reaching an acceptable standard of living for all people. It means that people have the basic things they need to live, have the right to make choices about their lives and the opportunities to improve their living situations. Developed countries are not necessarily rich countries, and all rich countries are not necessarily developed. For example, rich countries may not be considered developed if they have a few very rich people and many very poor people, and if many people do not have healthcare and education, clean air and water, roads and electricity. Social justice and equity-equality are important conditions for genuine development.

Development as a concept

Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (2009) views development as an act of improving by expanding or enlarging or refining; a process in which something passes by degrees to a different stage (especially a more advanced or mature stage). This can be defined as a continuous and liberating process, which involves a total but gradual change of people and society. Adams in Onyeozu (2007) defines development as improvement and progress, or simply as advancement. Adreski in Onyeozu (2007) sees development as westernization or modernization. Palms in Onyeozu (2007) defines development as a continuous process of positive change in the quality and span of life of a person or group of persons.

There are six cultural dimensions of a community that undergoes change. Development means social change in all six cultural dimensions: technological, economic, political, interactive, ideological and world view.

Development is a co-operative effort of many. The Governments of poor countries work to improve their incomes, and, in most cases, to improve the lives of their people. Institutions like the World Bank among many other charitable groups around the world also provide money and projects to improve the lives of poor people. These groups and governments established a list of goals that the whole world today is striving to reach-the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Development, by its nature, will always be ongoing, even when these basic goals are met. People will always try to improve the quality of their lives. Development efforts should be sustainable. This means meeting today's needs without creating problems for future generations.

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 man's personality is enhanced; and it is that enhanced personality-creative, organized and

disciplined – which is the moving 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. On the contrary, when a society is properly oriented, organized and disciplined, it can be prosperous on the scantiest basis of natural wealth (Scnitton & Luttrell, 2007).

Development according to Amirize (1999) proceeds from the inside and then manifests on the outside in the standard and quality of what people say, do and think. Any development in an individual or a community which does not reflect in the ennoblement of the quality of speech, action, behavior and thinking of the people both individually and collectively, is a development that is not rooted inside and can therefore be regarded as mere sham and pretence. Little and apparently insignificant things that people say or do often betray their inward development. Nobility of character is an expression of inward development in an individual.

Classification of Development

Development can be classified into the following; economic development, social development, political development, physical, environmental, psychological development, etc (Oyebamiji & Adekola, 2008). To this end, Onyeozu (2008) observed that development is a multi-dimensional process involving the organization and re-orientation of entire economic and social systems.

Social Development (Wikipedia, 2011) is a process which results in the transformation of social structures in a manner which improves the capacity of the society to fulfill its aspirations. Society develops by consciousness and social consciousness develops by organization. The process that is subconscious in the society emerges as conscious knowledge in pioneering individuals. Development is a process, not a programme. Its power issues more from its subtle aspects than from material objects.

Not all social change constitutes development. It consists of four well-marked stages -- survival, growth, development and evolution, each of which contains the other three within it. The quantitative expansion of existing activities generates growth or horizontal expansion. Development implies a qualitative change in the way the society carries out its activities, such as through more progressive attitudes and behavior by the population, the adoption of more effective social organizations or more advanced technology which may have been developed elsewhere.

According to (Wikipedia, 2011) Socio-economic development is the process of social and economic development in a society. Socio-economic development is measured with indicators, such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Changes in less-tangible factors are also considered, such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm, and the extent of participation in civil society. Causes of socio-economic impacts are, for example, new technologies, changes in laws, changes in the physical environment and ecological changes.

Political development means broadly, the development of the institutions, attitudes, and values that form the political power system of a society. Political development has been defined in many ways that reflect the passage of societies' and analysts' preoccupations. One formulation dwells on the emergence of national sovereignty and the integrity of the state, demanding respect and upholding commitments in the international system. Others identify the domestic attributes of constitutional order and political stability, attained through the formation of a settled framework of government, reliable procedures for leadership succession, and a consolidation of the territorial administrative reach of government institutions. Political development enhances the state's capacity to mobilize and allocate resources, to process policy inputs into implementable outputs. This assists with problem-solving and adaptation to environmental changes and goal realization. The contemporary notion of good governance also dwells on efficient, effective, and non-corrupt public administration (Oyebamiji & Adekola, 2008).

Many Marxists define political development in advanced industrial societies in terms of the growth of the class consciousness and political organization of the proletariat, leading, ultimately, to the overthrow of capitalism and the approach of communism. A more common (though ethnocentric) view is progress towards liberal democracy, involving accountable government, and opportunities for participation (also seen by some as an aspect of modernization, rather than development), through the exercise of freedoms of association and expression. More recently democratization and good governance have been portrayed as constitutive of political development and as conditions for sustained economic development in developing areas and post-communist societies. The rule of

law (and thus respect for property rights) and the development of civil society are also included. The embedding of human rights is another central plank.

Political development is neither linear nor irreversible; not all countries are experiencing it, and some endure periods of political decline and decay, while a few suffer terminal political breakdown, like the former USSR (Bartle, 2009).

Economic Development refers to increases in the standard of living of a nation's population associated with sustained growth from a simple, low-income economy to a modern, high-income economy. Its scope includes the process and policies by which a nation improves the economic, political, and social well-being of its people (Wikipedia, 2011).

Bartle (2009) defines economic development as the analysis of the economic development of nations. He states that economic development or development is a term that economists, politicians, and others have used frequently in the 20th century. The concept, however, has been in existence in the West for centuries. Modernization, Westernization, and especially Industrialization are other terms people have used when discussing economic development. Although no one is sure when the concept originated, most people agree that development is closely bound up with the evolution of capitalism and the demise of feudalism.

Economic Growth and Economic Development

Economic development refers to social and technological progress. It implies a change in the way goods and services are produced, not merely an increase in production achieved using the old methods of production on a wider scale. Economic growth implies only an increase in quantitative output; it may or may not involve development. Economic growth is often measured by rate of change of gross domestic product (eg. percent GDP increase per year.) Gross domestic product is the aggregate value-added by the economic activity within a country's borders. Economic development typically involves improvements in a variety of indicators such as literacy rates, life expectancy, and poverty rates.

Concept of Community

Communis comes from a combination of the Latin prefix com (which means "together") and the word munis probably originally derived from the Etruscan word munis (meaning "to have the charge of). The concept of community no longer has geographical limitations such as a village, settlement or district, but also includes those brought together by lifestyle, religion, hobby, interest, etc but as people who share common interests who can virtually gather regardless of physical location on an entirely voluntary basis (Beacons, 2008).

Hearn in Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) defined Community as a consciously identified population with common needs and interests; it may occupy a common physical space, engage in common activities and have some form of organization that provides for difference in functions, making it adaptive to its environment as a means of meeting common needs. Its components include individuals, groups, families and organizations within its population and the institutions it forms to meet its needs. A community group often pursues a common goal, concern or interest.

Community Development

Community development is a structured intervention that gives communities greater control over the conditions that affect their lives (Bartle, 2009). This does not solve all the problems faced by a local community, but it does build up confidence to tackle such problems as effectively as any local action. Community development is a skilled process and part of its approach is the belief that communities cannot be helped unless they themselves agree to this process. Community development is crucially concerned with the issues of powerlessness and disadvantage: as such it should involve all members of society, and offers a practice that is part of a process of social change.

The Community development process is collective, but the experience of the process enhances the integrity, skills, knowledge and experience, as well as equality of power, for each individual who is involved. Community Development is about developing the power, skills, knowledge and experience of people as individuals and in groups, thus enabling them to undertake initiatives of their own to combat social, economic, political and environmental problems, and enabling them to fully participate in a truly democratic process.

The Trend of Development in Nigeria

Nigeria cannot be described as a truly industrializing country; rather, it is in a preliminary process of

industrialization. The pattern of economic development is grossly lop-sided, whereby less than 20% of the population control and enjoy more than 80% of the wealth of the nation, while more than 80% of the population are left to scramble over the remaining 20% of the nation's wealth. This situation creates room for disaffection and animosity in the country (Dike, 2006).

More than 60% of the Nigerian population living in the urban towns, are either unemployed, under employed, engaged in menial jobs or criminal activities in order to survive the harsh economic conditions. Like the economy, the Nigerian political structure is quite unstable and lop-sided, characterized by class, sectional or ethnic domination (Ake, 2002).

The mono-product nature of the nation's economy has led to a vicious and ruthless scramble for a monopoly of control of the nation's political and economic affairs by a privileged elite group. This situation has resulted to gross abuses and marginalization of less dominant groups and ethnic minorities. Acquisition of wealth by privileged individuals has not been as a result of productive, creative and patriotic endeavours but largely the result of a patronage and sinecure system. This system undermines productivity and promotes corruption and indolence in the country (Dike, 2006).

The culture of ruthless scramble for control of power and wealth can be described as primitive and inhuman, capable of alienating the citizens. The growing disorientation in the Niger Delta made manifest in the numerous abductions/kidnappings, oil spills coupled with the growing disregard for noble values, truth and justice, would inevitably lead to a vicious cycle whereby the nation would experience a perpetual state of corruption and instability. There can be no genuine development in any nation without the individuals first imbibing the deals of nobility, truth, honesty, productivity and justice. Only such noble ideals can form the basis of a lasting and genuine development.

For the rural dwellers, any change or policy which would dispossess them of their ancestral land is looked upon with suspicion and resistance, unless they are convinced that such a change would be in their best interest. The exploitative nature of the Nigerian economy coupled with glaring insecurity and abuses in the political system make a collective mobilization of the masses towards noble endeavours quite difficult. The Nigerian school system reflects and is affected by all plights of the nation, namely: corrupt practices, disregard for merit and productivity; unhealthy scrambles, abuse of power and position and wastage of resources, etc.

Misconceptions about Community Development Programmes

With the issues discussed above concerning community development, this researcher went on to test the level of awareness of the people of Ahoada (East) Local Government Area of Rivers State (2012), in respect of what development meant to them. Through the help and cooperation of the councilor in charge of community development in the LGA, Mr. T. Okpaji, a questionnaire designed to sample opinions of the grassroots people was reproduced and distributed to 200 adults in 10 villages. A summary of the responses is as follows:

1. There has been no organized awareness campaign meant to sensitise and educate the grassroots people in the LGA, on the real meanings and processes of community development.
2. Grassroots involvement and participation in past community development projects in the LGA had not been regular features. Rather, the people merely witnessed project activities without even knowing who the sponsors were – federal, state or local government, or corporate organizations.
3. Development projects in the LGA were regarded by the grassroots people as baits by politicians to gather popularity and win support of the people, usually when elections were around.
4. The grassroots people in Ahoada (East) LGA have no awareness about different types of community development projects such as
 - (a) Large – scale infrastructural projects
 - (b) Long – term human capacity building programmes
 - (c) Short – time micro development projects, and
 - (d) Emergency intervention programmes.
5. The concept of grassroots stakeholders in community development was considered strange and unknown to the people of Ahoada East Local Government Area, neither had any villager been consulted for any opinion with regards to development project meant for the community.
6. Social justice and equity- equality as concepts of modern community development programmes were alien and unknown to the people of Ahoada East Local Government Area. Matters relating to justice and equity were seen by the people as issues for the courts to dispense or determine.
7. More than 60% of respondents did not agree that the role of local government authorities included bringing development programmes closer to the door-steps of people in rural communities. On the

country, there was general cynicism about local councilor being agents to community development.

CONCLUSION

A responsible and meaningful way to move the nation forward must include calling on immediate halt to the drift and dangerous direction of development through a serious and sincere national reconstruction and re-orientation conference, a conference that would leave no stone unturned in placing the nation on the right path.

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