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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PROJECT EXECUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: A NON-FORMAL EDUCATION APPROACH

A. O. SHOLAGBERU & T. T. AMBALI

Abstract

This paper focuses on the knowledge and skills of community agents and village level workers as part of non-formal education process for ensuring community participation in project identification, selection and formulation for sustainable development at the grass root level. Conceptual clarification was presented sequentially together with skills needed by village level workers and community agents in stimulating community participation. It was concluded that the selection of sustainable community driven development projects is a matter that should concern village level workers. It was further recommended that there is a need for community mobilization on the importance of active participation of all members of the community in any project designed for the development of their community. There is a need as well for wider dissemination of knowledge that will be geared towards a better understanding of community project, its nature, dimension and its feasibility study.

Keywords: Community participation, Project execution, Non-Formal education

INTRODUCTION

In some countries, where there are gaps in the formal public and private education systems, non-formal education programmes are a way to reach children, youths, and adults with instruction. Non-formal programmes are an umbrella designated for a wide array of activities, including alternative primary schools, youth training, literacy programmes, and professional education. Non-formal education is an umbrella term which covers all aspects of learning that takes place outside the regular school setting (Anyanwu, 2002). It encompasses adult education, community development, extension education and other refresher courses that would enable people to improve themselves for development of their community. The return of party politics in Nigeria after nearly two decades of military rule marks a new chapter in the annals of grassroots development initiatives. Under the present political dispensation, community interest would be effectively articulated and aggregated. Development simply put refers to the ability to improve our lives and make life better for ourselves either as individuals, in our communities, and our nation (Shitu, 2002). Grassroot development depicts development at the local level and symbolizes community development. Sustainable developments represent development that meets the needs of the present population without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs (UN DP, 2003).

Non-formal education serves as a means of educating the people in the process of development. In the course of project execution, they learn new methods or acquire the skills and knowledge on how to go about setting up a programme, sustain it and move it towards a productive end (Adeyinka, 2006). Participation of community members is very crucial to community development in project identification, selection and formulation. For sustainable development to take place, there has to be active and untiring participation of all the people in the community. This drive for community participation rested on the skill

employed by the development workers or community agents who will carry all the members along in the community project. Community development workers especially village level staff are the main catalyst for grassroot development and stimulators of sustainable development at the local government level. This therefore places them solidly on the right position for responding to community needs, wishes, aspirations and initiatives. It is against this background that sensitization on the need to imbibe relevant skills for effective communal project formulation for sustainable development becomes imperative. This paper focuses essentially on skills for promoting community participation in project identification and selection, including project formulation for sustainable development at the local level.

Conceptual Clarification

Community refers to a group of people with face to face contact, bound by common value and objectives, with basic harmony of interests and aspiration (Omoruyi, 2001). It means that the people that form a community are known to share basic conditions of a common life, including problem, needs and aspirations. Community participation means the voluntary involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions which enhance their wellbeing. It depicts a process whereby a community is provided with the opportunity to make inputs in matters affecting their problems (Anyanwu, 2002). Community participation in development creates sense of community ownership of projects/programmes and enhances sustainability of community driven projects. Project identification according to Lawal (2010) represents the process of organizing communities to address their needs and challenges by carefully focusing on project that would enhance the level of living or focusing on projects that would enhance the level of living of members of the community. However, because community needs and challenges are numerous, it becomes necessary to choose projects that would be effective and appropriate for the community; hence the issue of project selection. Project selection also covers not only project type but also project location and timing for execution.

Having selected a project to address an issue, concern or challenge of a community, then project formulation covers the total packaging of the project for implementation. These according to Salawu (2009) include the project design, project preparation, project implementation plan, implementation schedule, and actual execution as well as project evaluation scheme. It is important for the project to fit neatly into the requirements of sustainable development. This means that the project itself must be sustainable. According to Lawal (2010), a project is said to be sustainable if it meets at least three conditions as follows:

- It is affordable for all;
- It will last for a very long time: generations to come will be able to benefit;
- It is for everyone and would be protected by everyone (Shitu, 2002).

Community Participation in Project Identification and Selection

For communities to be involved in project identification and selection, they have to be organized effectively to promote developmental issues. This according to Omokemi

(2007) requires the existence or the formation of active grassroot organizations such as Community Based Organization (CBOs) or Self Help Groups (SHGs). Such grassroot groups are expected to sufficiently mobilize the people to participate in all development initiatives within or for the community. Ezimah (2004) identify three ways in which community members can participate in community programme; these include, community diagnosis, community needs prioritization through consensus and project selection forum. Community diagnosis involves collection of relevant information about the key concerns, challenges, strengths and weaknesses of the community. The Village Level Workers can lead the process through a well-planned participatory community survey. The participatory survey would stimulate interests of the people, thus proving baseline data against which the opinion of the people can be reconciled. The opinion of the people on their aspirations, ways of overcoming their problems and their views on needed improvements in the community would be sought, analyzed, synthesized and articulated. This would form the background for delimiting the kind of project to be identified and selected for execution in the community.

Community needs prioritization through consensus, require that the people can be mobilized to re-order their needs as a basis for selection of relevant project for the community. This would require consideration of resource capability of the community and the exploration of relevant outlets for sourcing resources for implementation of the identified and selected project. Project selection forum involves adequate representations of all sections of the community including the different organizations (youth, women, business, occupational etc) thus provides the platform for thorough scrutiny of the identified projects for the community so that a relevant project is isolated for detailed considerations by the community representatives. The forum therefore paves way for actual selection of the project to be packaged for implementation.

Community Participation in Project Formulation

The community can participate and Village Levels Workers and community agents can assist in stimulating community participation in the following areas such as, project design where the people can participate in the design of projects selected based on people's priority. Although design issues are purely technical in nature, participatory-design evaluation can be encouraged. The people can evaluate prototype designs for selected projects. This will certainly promote community acceptability. Project Preparation requires that the community members could be involved at the pre-take off stage of the project. Roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated.

Resources mobilization involves community involvement in stock taking of needed and available resources, actual sourcing of the resources (financial, technical, material, labour etc) for the execution of the project. Project implementation plans and schedules imply the step by step actions of activities required towards project execution including the timeline and responsibility matrix. The design of plans and schedules is best done through appropriate representation, possibly an implementation committee made up of dedicated members of the community especially project promoters and community innovators. On project execution, the people are or could be involved in various stages of execution using the resource mobilized.

Skills required by Village Level Workers (VLWS) and Community Agents for Promoting Community Participation in Project

Village level workers according to Shittu (2002) are expected to assist communities to organize themselves for effective change. One of the roles played in this regard is guiding community groups in the identification, selection, and formulation of community driven projects. These roles as observed by Fashokun (2006) require some basic skills such as the following:

- **Planning skills:** This skill is necessary to assist communities to select the right type of project.
- **Needs Assessment skills:** This skill can facilitate effective planning and provide clear focus on the choice of relevant and sustainable project.
- **Resource assessment skills:** This skill can help in searching, screening and utilization of needed resources for project implementation. The skills include stock taking capability, resources matching, sourcing, management, use and the determination of resource constraints.
- **Decision making skills:** This skill can assist in making relevant and suitable choices for the community. Some of the skills include trend forecasting skills, familiarity with alternative choices, participatory skills and knowledge of community goals and values.

Conclusion

The selection of sustainable community driven development projects is a matter that should concern village level workers. The village level workers and community agents therefore require the appropriate knowledge and skills to foster participation on the people in — the selection process. These knowledge and skills need to be achieved through non-formal system of education. Even the process of mobilization and sensitization of community members to engage in active participation on community projects also require non-formal education methods for the successful implementation of the project. Hence, it can be asserted that non-formal education encompasses all stages of community projects advocacy, mobilization, mentorship, participation and other strategies for ensuring sustainable grassroot development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In the light of the discussion above, some measures have been proposed for effective community participation in the project identification, selection and formulation for grassroot sustainable development. These include among others:

1. There is a need for community mobilization on the importance of active participation of all members of the community in any project designed for the development of their community.
2. There is a need for wider dissemination of knowledge that will be geared towards a better understanding of community project, its nature, dimension and its feasibility study.
3. There is a need for adequate funding of community project through government and

- non-governmental organization collaboration.
4. The felt-needs of the community need to be considered prominently before any meaningful planning can take place. This is because of the fact that an undesirable project or projects that is not of urgent needs to the community members may not attract them to participate actively unless it is of most stringent needs.
 5. There is the need for community agents to ensure that community members are involved in the decision making process of the identified project.
 6. Community base organizations and associations have to be integrated and sensitized on the process of identifying a viable project that is sustainable in nature. This can be in terms of affordability, longevity and protected by everyone in the community.

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