

Community Participation and Rural Development in Nasarawa State

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Abstract: This paper discusses community participation in rural development as a panacea for rural poverty reduction with Nasarawa State as a reference point with the evaluation of the effects of community participation in five rural development projects executed in two rural communities in Lafia and Akwanga Local Government Areas of the State. The concepts of “community participation” and “rural development” as well as Top-Down and Bottom-Up approaches to rural development are examined. The instruments used in data collection for this work were a combination of questionnaire administered to a sample size of 95 respondents from the communities and focused group discussion using unstructured oral interview. Secondary data were also used from existing literature on community participation and rural development. The data collected were analyzed and presented in frequency tables. The findings of the study showed that most rural development projects fail because the benefitting communities are not involved in the conception and execution of such projects and that there is a significant correlation between community participation and rural development projects in Nasarawa State. The paper also examines the relevance of community participation in rural development and poverty reduction. In order to improve and encourage community participation in rural development projects for sustainable rural development, it is recommended that government and development agencies/partners should involve communities in project initiations and executions in which the communities act as partners in generating, interpreting and using information through which they analyze and prioritize their local development needs. The paper concludes that for effective rural development, the bottom-up approach should be advocated in executing rural development projects.

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Background to the Study

Government and other development partners/agencies in their quest to improve the quality of life of the rural dwellers by reducing poverty among them had always embarked on development projects in rural communities. However, some of these projects do not meet the expected goal they were supposed to achieve as they fail to meet the exact needs and yearnings of the beneficiaries. This is because such projects are conceived and implemented without involving the rural populace who should be partners in the development process of

their communities. Among some of the reasons for such failure is lack of participation by the communities in the initiation, conception, monitoring and execution of such projects. Participation by the communities in development projects is seen as important in the success and sustainability of rural development projects in rural communities. For example, Philip (1998), when looking at the concept of participation in rural development and its relevance observed thus: “participation in rural development is now generally assumed to be a good if not vital thing. The assumption is that more participation is better than less and that past development strategies failed through its absence.” This means that community participation is very crucial in any development process in rural communities. Rural people who development projects are to benefit should be involved and included in the decision-making process concerning those projects.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to evaluate the effects of community participation in rural development in relation to rural poverty reduction.

The Scope of the Study

The scope of this study covers two communities in Nasarawa State where five rural development projects were executed. The communities are Rinze in Akwanga Local Government Area and Sandaka in Lafia Local Government of the State. Sandaka Community consists of three villages - Sabon Pegi, Doka and Andasimu. Two projects were located in Rinze Community (Solar Energy Rural Electrification Project and Primary Health Care Centre) and three other projects (Rural Electricity Supply in Sabon Pegi Village, Construction of Two Blocks of Three Classrooms each at Government Junior Secondary in Doka and Andasimu as well as Digging of Three Concrete Wells each in Sabon Pegi, Andasimu and Dokka) in Sandaka Community.

Conceptual Clarification

i. Community Participation

The concept ‘community participation’ has been considered as an important aspect in rural poverty alleviation. The main objective of this participation is to empower the people in the community. Participation is a complex issue, and this is particularly true in rural poverty alleviation programmes, where a number of multiple factors interact within the entire participation procedure (Hoe *et al.*, 2018).

Paul, (1987) looks at community participation as “an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish”.

Cohen and Uphof (1977), while looking at participation with regard to rural development, say “participation includes people’s involvement in decision making process, implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes.” They went on to say, “community participation in rural development projects involves planning and implementation of projects and programmes encompassing planning of meetings, sourcing of views, choice of project from available lots, project location, funding, implementation, monitoring, evaluation as well as sustainability. From the above elements, community participation in development projects stands for partnership which is built upon the basis of dialogue among the various actors, during which agenda is jointly set, and local views and indigenous knowledge are

deliberately sought and respected. This implies negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set project agenda. Thus people become actors instead of being beneficiaries.

The World Bank (1994) describes participation “as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives on the decisions and resources which affect them”.

The word *participation* as used in this study means involvement and/or inclusiveness of people in a process. For the purpose of this study, we would look at participation in the context of community participation in rural development projects by rural communities and the effects of such participation.

ii. Rural Development

The word “rural” means different things to different people at different times. For example, The American Bureau of Census classifies a group of people living in a community having a population of not more than 2,500 people as rural, whereas in Nigeria, the Federal Office of Statistics defines a community with less than 20,000 people as rural.

Rural development on the other hand has therefore, been described in different ways by different authors, depending on the discipline or line of thought of the person concerned. This is because the subject of rural development is multi-disciplinary and the definition by an author will depend on the area where he/she focuses attention. But all definitions have a central theme, which is “improvement of living conditions of the rural people”. What the different definitions do is to lay emphasis on the process of getting the central objective of rural development achieved.

Aslam (1981) defined the concept as “a process aimed at developing the rural poor, their economy and institutions from a state of stagnation or low productivity equilibrium into dynamic process leading to higher levels of living and better quality of life.” Similarly, (Schumacher, 1983) conceived rural development as “developing the skill of the masses to make them self-reliant through instruction which supply appropriate and relevant knowledge on the methods of self-help”. Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. The group includes small-scale farmers, tenants and the landless (Aliy, 1999). Taken together, available definitions emphasize the central point that rural development is about promoting the welfare and productivity of rural communities, about the scope and quality of participation of rural people in that process, and about the structure, organization, operations and interactions and facilities which make this possible.

Rural development is action that helps people to recognize and develop their ability and potential and organize themselves to respond to problems and needs which they share. It supports the establishment of strong rural community development agencies that control and use assets to promote social justice and help improve the quality of community life. It also enables community and other public agencies to work together to improve the quality of government.

The scope of the concept of rural or community development is very wide. It is a multi-dimensional process involving such areas as agriculture, health, education, provision of rural infrastructures, social life, political and economic issues, commerce and industry, among

others, and their integration with the national economy. Since the scope of the concept is wide it is therefore, the pivot on which a sound national development in all its ramifications can effectively be achieved.

Rural development is concerned with the self-sustaining improvement of rural areas and implies a broad based re-organization and mobilization of the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily task of their lives and with the changes consequent upon this (Mabogunje, 1981).

Approaches to Rural Development

There are a number of approaches to rural development depending on the angle one is looking at the concept. However, two prominent approaches are considered here – the Top-down Approach and Bottom-Up Approach.

Top-down Approach

The classical formulation of rural development prevalent in the world after the World War II, was a top-down model (driven from outside and sometimes called exogenous). This theory has a significant philosophical and practical history predating the bottom-up model. The top-down model is structured around the use of professional leadership provided by external resources that plan, implement and evaluate development programmes. Rural development programmes using this model typically focus on providing professional leadership to development process coupled with supportive concrete services. According to Shucksmith (2013), top-down approach to development was criticized as dependent development, reliant on continued subsidies and the policies of distant agencies and boardrooms. It was seen as distorted development and was cast as destructive development, which erased the cultural and environmental differences of rural areas and unresponsive to local knowledge held within these localities. It is a dictated development devised by experts and planners from outside local rural areas. Lowe, Murdock and Ward (1995) posited that top-down model has attendant consequences on rural development because the beneficiaries are completely not part of the design, planning, execution and monitoring and evaluation of the project. Therefore, it will suffer the issue of lack of project ownership and sustainability thereby leading to project abandonment and not achieving the set goal.

Bottom-up Approach

There was growing evidence in the late 1970s that Top-down model of rural development had not worked. Shucksmith (2000), the bottom-up approach to rural development is a type of development that is driven from within or also called endogenous and is based on the assumption that specific resources of an area—human, natural and cultural hold the key to its development. The bottom-up approach means that local actors participate in decision making about the strategy and in the selection of the priorities to be pursued in their local area. The involvement of local actors includes the population at large, economic and social interest groups and representatives of public and private institutions. Local people are conceived as experts on the development of their territory.

Bryden and Hart (2004) opined that “.....capacity building is an essential component of the bottom-up approach, involving: awareness raising, training, participation and mobilization of local population to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their area; participation of different interest groups in drawing up a local development strategy and establishment of clear criteria for selection at local level of appropriate actions to deliver the strategy.” In bottom-up approach, participation is not limited to the initial phases but extends throughout

the implementation process, contributing to the strategy, the accomplishment of the selection of projects and in stock-taking and learning for the future.

Sample Size of the Study

Respondents were drawn from stakeholders of the various projects in the two communities of Rinze and Sandaka. A total of 95 respondents were administered questionnaires based on the number of projects from each village. The questionnaires were administered as follows: Village Heads 5, Men Group Leaders 30, Women Group Leaders 30 and Youths Group Leaders 30. This sample size was chosen because it reflects the opinion leaders and stakeholders of these communities in terms of decision making.

Table 1 below shows the distribution of copies of questionnaire.

There are five projects, A, B, C, D, and E in which questionnaires were administered.

- 1) Project 'A' is Solar Energy Rural Electrification Project at Rinze Community
- 2) Project 'B' is Primary Health Care Centre at Rinze Community
- 3) Project 'C' is Rural Electricity Supply at Sabon Pegi Village in Sandaka Community
- 4) Project 'D' is Construction of Two Blocks of Three Classrooms each at Doka and Andasimu Junior Secondary Schools in Sandaka Community
- 5) Project 'E' is Digging of Three Concrete Wells each at Sabon Pegi, Doka and Andasimu Villages in Sandaka Community

Nineteen copies of questionnaire were administered per project.

Table 1. Questionnaire Distribution

Group	Project A	Project B	Project C	Project D	Project E	Total
Village Heads	1	1	1	1	1	5
Men Leaders	6	6	6	6	6	30
Women Leaders	6	6	6	6	6	30
Youth Leaders	6	6	6	6	6	30
Total	19	19	19	19	19	95

Source: Field survey (2018)

Table 2 shows the number of questionnaires completed and returned after they were administered. Out of the 95 questionnaires given, 92 copies were completed and returned, representing 97% of the questionnaires administered. Three (3) questionnaires, representing 3% (1 from Men's Group and 2 from Women's Group) were not returned. The 97% (92) questionnaires returned formed the basis of the data analysis of this study, since 3% unreturned questionnaires is insignificant and has no effect on the overall result.

Table 2. Questionnaires administered and returned

Group	Administered	Returned	% Returned
Village Heads	5	5	5.26
Men Leaders	30	29	30.52
Women Leaders	30	28	29.47
Youth Leaders	30	30	31.57
Total	95	92	96.82

Source: Field survey (2018)

The questionnaire administered was a combination of closed-and open-ended questionnaire. The respondents were residents and stakeholders of these communities cutting across different occupational and educational groups. The respondents fall into four classification namely; Village Heads, Men Group Leaders, Women Group Leaders and Youths Group Leaders. The questionnaire contains personal information and attitude statements dealing on community participation and its effects on five rural development projects in the communities.

Ninety-five (95) questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher and ninety-two were collected back after one week. The scoring of responses which form the basis of data analysis of this study is grouped into two—yes or no.

The researcher also used unstructured oral interview during data collection from the communities. The interviewees were the same people that were administered questionnaires.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 3 below shows the locations of the five rural development projects as well as categories of participants by the communities.

Table 3. Five rural development projects, categories of participants and project locations

Communities:		Rinze		Sandaka			
		Projects					
Response	Group	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Yes	Village Heads	0	1	1	1	1	4
	Men Leaders	0	9	8	4	4	25
	Women Leaders	0	11	5	6	4	26
	Youth Leaders	0	12	5	4	1	22
No	Village Heads	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Men Leaders	2	0	1	1	1	5
	Women Leaders	2	0	1	0	1	4
	Youth Leaders	3	0	1	1	0	5
Total		8	33	22	17	12	92

Source: Field survey (2018)

As seen from the table, there was no community participation at any level in Project A, while in Projects B–E communities were involved at all levels of community participation ranging from meetings, choice of projects and their locations, cost and sources of funding for projects to monitoring and evaluation of such projects.

Effects of Community Participation and/or Non-participation in the Five Rural Development Projects

On the effects of community participation/non-participation on the five rural development projects responses from eight questions drawn from the questionnaire dealing with statements of effects of community were gotten on each of the projects which are presented in Tables 4 to 8. Table 4 shows the responses on Project A at Rinze Community which was completed but was not functioning. Out of a total of 152 responses, 38 responses show that there was a

positive effect on community participation on the project while 114 responses indicate that there was no any positive effect on community participation on the project.

Tables 5 to 8 give responses on projects B, C, D and E which show that community participation in these projects has positive effects which was why all these projects were successfully executed and were functioning. Table 9 is an aggregation of responses on the effects of community participation/non-participation on the five rural development projects (responses on tables 4 to 8). It is from this table that our conclusion is drawn, since the research work is aimed at evaluating the effects of community participation in rural development in Nasarawa State.

The table gives a total of 736 responses gotten from questions dealing with effects of community participation on the five rural development projects. Out of this, a total of 554 responses, representing 75.27% agreed that community participation in rural development projects has positive effects, while 182 responses, representing 24.73% are of the opinion that community participation does not have any effect in rural development projects.

Table 4. Effects of community participation/non-participation on Project A

Question	Yes	No
If the community were consulted, would it had agreed to the sitting of the project at the present location?	0	19
Was the project the most paramount need of the community?	0	19
If the community was allowed to choose a project of its own, would it had selected a different project from the one executed?	19	0
Was the project executed successfully?	0	19
Has the community benefitted from the project?	0	19
Is the project currently functioning?	0	19
Has the community felt sense of ownership of the project after it was executed?	0	19
Do you agreed that the project failed because the community was not involved?	19	0
Total response	38	114

Table 5. Effects of community participation/non-participation on Project B

Question	Yes	No
If the community were consulted, would it had agreed to the sitting of the project at the present location?	19	0
Was the project the most paramount need of the community?	19	0
If the community were allowed to choose a project of its own, would it had selected a different project from the one executed?	19	0
Was the project executed successfully?	0	19
Has the community benefitted from the project?	19	0
Is the project currently functioning?	19	0
Has the community felt sense of ownership of the project after it was executed?	19	0
Do you agreed that the project succeeded because the community was involved?	19	0
Total response	133	19

Table 6. Effects of community participation/non-participation on Project C

Question	Yes	No
If the community was consulted, would it had agreed to the sitting of the project at the present location?	19	0
Was the project the most paramount need of the community?	19	0
If the community were allowed to choose a project of its own, would it had selected a different project from the one executed?	0	11
Was the project executed successfully?	19	0
Has the community benefitted from the project?	19	0
Is the project currently functioning?	19	0
Has the community felt sense of ownership of the project after it was executed?	19	0
Do you agreed that the project succeeded because the community was involved?	19	0
Total response	133	11

Table 7. Effects of community participation/non-participation on Project D

Question	Yes	No
If the community were consulted, would it had agreed to the sitting of the project at the present location?	19	0
Was the project the most paramount need of the community?	19	0
If the community were allowed to choose a project of its own, would it had selected a different project from the one executed?	0	19
Was the project executed successfully?	19	0
Has the community benefitted from the project?	19	0
Is the project currently functioning?	19	0
Has the community felt sense of ownership of the project after it was executed?	19	0
Do you agreed that the project succeeded because the community was involved?	19	0
Total response	133	19

Table 8. Effects of community participation/non-participation on Project E

Question	Yes	No
If the community were consulted, would it had agreed to the sitting of the project at the present location?	11	0
Was the project the most paramount need of the community?	19	0
If the community were allowed to choose a project of its own, would it had selected a different project from the one executed?	0	19
Was the project executed successfully?	19	0
Has the community benefitted from the project?	19	0
Is the project currently functioning?	19	0
Has the community felt sense of ownership of the project after it was executed?	19	0
Do you agreed that the project succeeded because the community was involved?	11	0
Total response	117	19

Table 9. Aggregation of response on effects of community participation/non-participation on Projects A, B, C, D and E

Project	Yes	No	Total
A	38	114	152
B	133	19	152
C	133	11	144
D	133	19	152
E	117	19	136
Total	554	182	736

From the table, the 'Yes' response signifies that community participation has positive effects in rural development projects in Nasarawa State while the 'No' response means that community participation does not have any effect in rural development projects in the State. The table shows the aggregate responses on the effects of community participation/non-participation on the five rural development projects. It is an aggregation of responses on eight questions drawn from the questionnaire dealing with effects of community participation in the five selected rural development projects.

A total response of 736 (eight questions multiplied by ninety-two-number of questionnaires returned) was gotten from questions dealing with effects of community participation on the five rural development projects. Out of this, a total of 554 responses, representing 75.27% agreed that community participation in rural development projects has positive effects, while 182 responses, representing 24.73% are of the opinion that community participation does not have any effect in rural development projects.

Findings

The following were the findings of the study based on the data collected on the field:

- i) All projects were successfully completed and put to use. However, only four projects (B,C,D and E) were functioning at the time of data collection. Project A was not functioning due to vandalization of the component parts of the equipment of the project.
- ii) The people of Rinze Community said that "Solar Energy Rural Electrification Project" was not the need of the Community and that people were not consulted or involved before the project was executed.
- iii) The component parts of the solar panels were vandalized because there was no security arrangement to guide and protect the project.
- iv) The Rinze Community said that "The Primary Health Care Centre" was the most need of the people and that they participated in the choice of the project among other projects as well as its location. They added that they contributed N1,000,000.00 being ten percent (10%) of the project as their counterpart contribution and the project is well protected by the community.
- v) In Sandaka Community, the people said that all their development projects (Rural Electricity Supply, Construction of Two Blocks of Three Classrooms and Digging of Three Concrete Wells) and their locations were the choice of the people. That they participated in meetings that led to the conception and execution of such projects and that because the projects were the needs of the people, the community contributed ten percent (10%) of the cost as their contribution. They also added that these projects were functioning according to their expectations and that there was security arrangement to guide and protect the projects against vandalization.
- vi) The communities contributed 10% as their counterpart funds in Projects B-E.

vii) There is a significant correlation between community participation and rural development projects in Nasarawa State

Based on the findings of this study it was revealed that:

- a. Most rural development projects fail because the benefitting communities are not involved in the conception and execution of such projects
- b. Most development projects executed in rural communities without involving the people do not always meet the needs of the beneficiaries
- c. Community participation in rural development projects have positive effects in rural poverty reduction
- d. There is a significant correlation between community participation and rural development projects in Nasarawa State.

Relevance of Community Participation in Rural Development and Poverty Reduction

The importance of community participation in many African rural areas and the role played by local people in their own development cannot be overemphasized as research has proven that if local people are involved in their own development, sustainable development can be achieved. Different development aid agencies like NGOs tend to implement a top-down approach which excludes involvement and participation of communities and in turn leads to a dependency syndrome. Looking at the positive effects of community participation in rural development projects; (Wayne, 2013) observed that: “rural development is a process that includes mass participation of local people in decision making processes and development of their local areas. Over the years development has mainly focused on the urban sector and lack of state provision of health, education, clean water and sanitation is restricted, exposing poor rural people to health risks, reducing their productivity and opportunities. Underlying this is the very fact that people do not participate in their own development and as such they are not in a position of authority to provide information on what they regard as important and necessary.

The major problem in this regard is that government, aid agencies and other stakeholders that implement programmes to deal with rural development and poverty reduction impose programmes on local authorities and communities creating a dependency syndrome due to non-participation of the community. Most government institutions, NGOs and other stakeholders seem to be implementing a top-down approach in their national development strategies and as such poverty persists in most rural communities in Africa. As such, policies implemented by these various stakeholders are ineffective and have made overall poverty alleviation rather fragment and uncoordinated and much short of dynamism required to achieve desired results. In other words; non-participation of local authorities and communities means that community mobilization and participation is not being viewed as both a goal of development which requires that national resources and opportunities be equitably distributed, and as a way of facilitating and energizing the development effort by means of popular involvement in development decision making. Lack of empowerment amongst rural people leads to their vulnerability and thus most development projects tend to benefit the benefactors rather than the beneficiaries.”

Wayne (2013) went further to say that, “as an instrument of development, popular participation should provide the driving force for determination of people based development processes and willingness by the people to undertake sacrifices and expand their social energies for its execution. As an end in itself, popular participation is the fundamental right of the people to fully and effectively participate in the determination of the decisions which affect their lives and at all times. Beneficiary participation in development is widely believed

to be an essential ingredient of the development process. It enables beneficiaries to influence the decision and policy-making processes and facilitates the designing and enhances the implementation of plans, programmes and projects. It basically centres or hovers around people. In essence, participation results in the development of a feeling of ownership and belonging among beneficiaries which in the long run ensures the success and sustainability of a project or programme”.

In an ideal development situation, it is only the people who know what is important to them at any point in time and imposing a project on them will be of no benefit; for development to take place people must be involved in the process. In the light of this, sustainable development is not achieved because non-participation of local people means that rural development is not self-sustaining. Therefore, communities play important role in rural development process because they understand their situation and problems better than the government, aid agencies and other stakeholders. One of the biggest problems or upsets in most African rural communities is poverty which has detrimental effects on the socio-economic lives of local people. Participation and involvement of local people at grassroots level is important in curbing this phenomenon. Participation is a two-way process which requires that both the beneficiaries and the benefactors interact at all levels of the development process. As such community participation is an essential component that helps in facilitating rural sustainable development. For participatory development to be effective and meaningful it has to be accompanied with well thought-out conscientisation campaigns. This will enable participants to make rationale decisions or choices whether or not to participate in a given project. Wherever possible, beneficiary participation should be solicited from the outset of a given programme or project. The history of socio-economic development planning shows that more is achieved when the target beneficiaries are involved in all the steps of the process” (Wayne, 2013).

Philip (1998), when looking at the concept of participation in rural development and its relevance observed thus: “Participation in rural development is now generally assumed to be a good if not vital thing. The assumption is that more participation is better than less and that past development strategies failed through its absence.” This means that community participation is very crucial in any development process in rural communities. Rural people who development projects are to benefit should be involved and included in the decision-making process concerning such projects otherwise such projects would always fail.

Looking at the concept of community participation in rural development projects, Rahman (2012) stated that: “the tragedy of underdevelopment is not that the ordinary people have remained poor or are becoming poor, but that they have become inhibited from developing as humans. Elites have taken over the right to develop society, and by this way act and claim have distorted the natural and profound popular notion of development. For no one can develop others – one can only stretch or diminish others by trying to develop them”. People cannot be developed by others without involving them in the development process. Projects that have direct bearing and meet the needs and aspirations of the rural people must be initiated by involving them since they know what they need most. For such development projects to succeed members of the communities must be involved.

Conclusions

Rural development is a panacea for rural poverty reduction in developing and third world countries which involves the execution of development projects in rural communities aimed at improving the quality of lives of the rural poor. However, rural development efforts could

be ineffective in tackling poverty if the beneficiaries of such efforts are not involved in the decision making process concerning the projects to be executed. Participation and involvement of local people at grassroots level is important in curbing the challenge of rural poverty reduction. Participation is a two-way process which requires that both the beneficiaries and the benefactors interact at all levels of the development process. As such, community participation is an essential component that helps in facilitating rural sustainable development.

Community participation as an ingredient for effective rural development enables beneficiaries to influence the decision and policy-making processes and facilitates the designing and enhances the implementation of plans, programmes and projects. It basically hovers around people. In essence, participation results in the development of a feeling of ownership and belonging among beneficiaries which in the long run ensures the success and sustainability of a project or programme. It is the opinion of this paper that the bottom-up approach to rural development should be advocated for government and other development partners concerned with rural development because it involves local actors in decision making about the strategy and the selection of the priorities to be pursued in their local environment. Local people are conceived as experts on the development of their territory and so they should be involved in any development strategy adopted in executing any rural development projects.

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