
POLITICS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE NEED FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The success of community development programmes is often predicated on the commitment of stakeholders who could be indigenous elite at home and abroad to mobilize scarce resources for specific community development programmes. This study examines the essentiality of stakeholder's participation in community development. The study employed secondary sources of data. The finding from the study disclosed that success of community development programmes is often predicated on the commitment of stakeholders who could be indigenous elite at home and abroad to mobilize scarce resources for specific community development programmes. This study recommends that the participation of stakeholders will help in resolving the problem of mismatch between community development efforts and the actual needs of the beneficiaries in selecting the best community development programmes based on the paucity of their financial capability.

Keywords: Community, Development Stakeholders, Participation

Introduction

In the traditional conception of good government, the essence of political participation (politics) is to acquire political power in order to be in control of state resources that are usually utilized for socio-economic development and general welfare. However, overtime, democratic countries began to experience bad governance as politicians in control of national political power and state resources became capricious, corrupt and unaccountable, serving their personal interest at the expense of public welfare provisions and socio-economic development. The people were abandoned to their fate. This bad governance scenario coupled with wide societal needs gaps that were unfulfilled motivated the idea of stakeholders' mobilization for community development. Based on the foregoing, this paper examines politics and community development and the need for active participation of stakeholders in the community. The paper is structured into six segment which comprises the introduction, conceptual clarification, methodological issues, stakeholder's participation in community development, challenges of sustainable stakeholder's participation in community development, conclusion and the ways forward.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept politics is a generic concept that finds its relevance in all the sector of economy where human interactions take place. Aristotle (322-384 BCE) a Greek philosopher, a student of Plato and tutor of Alexander the Great in Mae (2007) perceived politics as a process of allocating scarce resources, power and authority to take a collective decisions in the society to determine Who should get what? How should power and other resources be distributed? Should society be based on cooperation or conflict? They also decide on how such matters should be resolved.

How should collective decisions be made? Who should have a say? How much influence should each person have? All these attributes made Aristotle to see politics as the activity through which human beings attempt to improve their lives through the identification of challenges and to resolve issues that affect their lives.

According to Olufemi (1995) politics is at the heart of all collective social activity, formal and informal, public and private, in all human groups, institutions and societies. In this sense, politics takes place at every level of social interaction; it can be found within families and amongst small groups within communities and on the global stage among nations. This assertion suffices Aristotle to conclude that man is apolitical animal. Therefore, both politics and community development involves the interaction of human beings coming together to make collective decisions on issues that affect their lives.

In pragmatic terms, politics is the process through which politicians assume power to bring about development to their electorates. Hence, both politics and community development are concerned with the issues of development.

Conversely, Appiah-Kubi (2020); Udu and Onwe, (2016) based on the International Co-operative Administration of the United States community development guidelines, defines community development as a process of social action through which the people of communities organize themselves to identify their common needs and problems, plan an action and execute the plans with a maximum reliance on the community resources and materials from government and nongovernmental agencies.

In a simple parlance, the United Nations defines Community Development as a process where community stakeholders unite together to initiate action on the identified common problems and to proffer lasting solutions to common problems. It is a concept which is highly embraced by development professionals, community stakeholders and civic leaders focusing to transform, modernize or to improve all the facets of communities to build a better society.

Equally, community development can be said to mean participation by the people themselves in an efforts to improve their standard of living through the provision of technical and social services in ways which encourages initiative and self-help. Ideally, it involves all the members of the community to fully participate from the inception of decision making down to its implementation (Mae, 2007; Abbott, 1995; and Olufemi, 1995).

Community development is expected to fashion out communities with high communal spirit of peaceful coexistence with one another. Community development is centers on the bottom up participatory approach of stakeholders to make collective decision and action on issues that affect their lives. At large, the end result of community development should enhance the common man to benefit from basic life necessities such as education, good road networks, health facilities, hygienic drinking water, modern housing, electricity, security of lives and properties, construction of drainages and culverts, and to access opportunities of empowerment programmes that will acquit them from abject poverty and squalor.

Methodological Issues

This paper relies basically on secondary sources of data consisting of textbooks, periodicals, journal publications, and other documentary sources such as internet and published empirical research reports.

Stakeholders Participation and Community Development

Government initiatives on community development policies and programmes to address the rural dweller's seemingly intractable socio-economic problems have failed. This major void created by the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the weak Federal, States and Local government structures has encouraged the intervention of community stakeholders in the formation of grass root movements and associations such as Progressive Forum to take up the initiatives of community development and self help through participatory approach.

The success of community development programmes is often predicated on the commitment of stakeholders who could be indigenous elite at home and abroad to mobilize scarce resources for specific community development programmes. The stakeholders, development associations, political class, and highly placed public servants that possess the dynamic and innovative qualities to harness the resources within and outside the community to provide some crucial needs of the community.

This implies that, the ability of the political stakeholders, the traditional rulers, and educated elites, military and paramilitary personnel to influence community development depends on the influence they exert on government bureaucratic and political structures. Therefore, the credibility of these stakeholders should be intimately connected to their ability to influence the provision of basic infrastructures to their constituencies/ home towns. They could also be evaluated on the number of quality empowerment schemes provided to lift the masses out of their hopeless situations. The question born in mind is who is a stakeholder?

According to Kornec (2020) a stakeholder is any individual, group or institution that has a vested interest in the natural resources of the project area or who potentially will be affected by project activities and has something to gain or lose if conditions change or remain the same. He generally categorized stakeholders into external and internal stakeholders.

The internal stakeholders are people, groups or institutions who can significantly influence or are particularly important to the success of a design programme and projects. While, the external stakeholders are people and groups who are not directly involved in project design but have influence over its success or are impacted indirectly. The external stakeholders could be the government institutions and the civic society like NGOs.

In our context, stakeholders of community development can be identify to includes politicians, elected executives in government, highly placed public servants, highly placed military and paramilitary officials (serving and retired), youths associations, women group, traditional elites or rulers. These important stakeholders need to work in concert in synergetic to request for government support or independently identified community needs so as to proffer strategic solutions to them in the form of project, programmes and services.

Community development in modern days of scarce resources needs collective participation of the community stake holders. Kornec (2020); Sisto, Lopolito and VanVliet (2018) identified the following benefits of stakeholder's participation in community development:

- ✓ The participation of stakeholder puts them in an advantageous position in understanding the needs and developmental challenges in their communities.
- ✓ It will serve as a functional monitoring mechanism to ensure effective and efficient programme implementations. It will also enable easy evaluation of progress and achievement made based on the stated objectives and set standard to be easily ascertained.
- ✓ The participation of stakeholders will help in resolving the problem of mismatch between community development efforts and the actual needs of the beneficiaries. This will curb the problem of duplication and concentration of projects and programmes in an area.
- ✓ The participation of stakeholders will enhance efficient and effective utilization of limited community resources. In this way, the stakeholders will be more focus in selecting cost-effective programmes based on the needs and resources at their disposal. This will facilitate the attainment of desired results.
- ✓ The active participation of stakeholders in community development programmes will facilitate a sense of belongingness that they are involve in taking decision on issued that affect their lives.

Moreover, community challenges or constraints which require concerted stakeholder participation in governance includes wide ranging community projects and programme needs like:

1. Impending community security challenges.
2. Poverty alleviation or interventions among community people.
3. Education support for the weak and vulnerable groups in the society like orphans, widows, etc.
4. Communal conflict resolutions involving peacemaking and peace building.
5. Very important projects and programmes needs of the society like the provision of infrastructural facilities.

Challenges of Sustainable Stakeholders Participation in Community Development

1. Lack of respected community development associations to mobilize stakeholders into community development.
2. Lack transparency and accountability of community representatives that would continue to mobilize the stakeholders through building confidence in stakeholders by keeping accurate account of their expenditure outlay through project execution. This has damaging consequences on stakeholder communal spirit.
3. The un-strategic approach in executing community development programmes and projects. Some extensive projects that need to be split into phases are always mumbled together and it will not deliver the expected results. This mostly weakens stakeholder's morale in the participation of such projects.
4. The deep religious discrimination and intractable leadership tussles will chill communal cooperative spirits thereby making the unions ineffective vehicles of grassroots mobilization and development.

5. Extreme individualism. This is a major operational defect of unions and stakeholders in the community development. They seem to be involved in an undeclared competition with each trying to out-do others in project initiation and execution. It breeds serious problem of discontinuity and abandonments of very important community projects.

Conclusion and the ways forward

Government failure at various levels created wide need gap which community social actions are organized to provide, without which society and human civilization would suffer. Stakeholder participation in governance therefore, represents the synergetic public private participation instruments for sustainability of human civilization.

Undoubtedly, community development is a social action which improves the economic, social, cultural and environmental situation of the communities. There is the need for political stakeholders, highly placed public servants, traditional rulers or elites, and development associations to embrace community development and self help projects and programmes through bottom-up participatory approach. In order to achieve this, it requires a synergy between community stakeholders, governmental and nongovernmental organizations to harness resources to intervene in providing services that are in tune with the yearning and aspirations of the communities. Through this, the communities will be able to provide efficient and effective services such as education, health services, security of lives and properties, basic infrastructural facilities and access empowerment schemes that will ensure their self reliant and to acquit them from abject poverty and squalor.

For sustainable community development through stakeholder's participation, community representatives handling the mobilization and inclusion of stakeholders in community development activities should endeavour to efficiently manage stakeholder's involvement affairs through exhibition of integrity, transparency and accountability in all affairs that involve bringing these dignitaries into community development and management of activities.

It is also worthwhile to applaud that success of community development efforts is contingent on the great role movements and associations like Progressive Forum played. Since they are also internal stakeholders it is easy to understand community needs and problems confronting community development. For the stakeholders to sustain and to replicate the success there is need to build communal spirit based on peaceful coexistence and avoidance of religious discriminations that will chill communal spirit.

Above all, good governance with its attributes of rule of law and legitimacy is the hallmark upon which community development and self help initiatives thrives. It will require all the inhabitants of the communities to be kept abreast of the prevalence of law above the individuals, groups and associations. With this, actions and decisions of the movements, associations and stakeholders will be guided to protect human rights and this will ensure delivery of desired quality community services to the people.

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