THE IMPERATIVE OF CITIZEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Chidi. E. Onyenemezu

Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, University of Port Harcourt,
Rivers State, NIGERIA.

dr.chidigodwin@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The paper examines citizen's participation in community development. It highlights the concepts of citizen, participation and community development. It illustrates the roles which citizens can play in community development, the benefits of citizen's participation in community development and how their participation could be facilitated in community development. The paper makes some recommendations and concludes that citizen's participation is an integral part of community development because without the citizens participating in any project/programme, there can never be community development.

Keywords: Citizen, Participation, Community, Development and Community development

INTRODUCTION

The success of any community development task in any community is never in doubt. This depends on appropriate planning, implementation, utilization and sustenance of the task in progress. This therefore requires the integration of several elements. This paper discusses one of such elements namely, citizen's participation. The concepts citizen, participation and community development need be defined in order to make this discourse more meaningful.

The Concept of Citizen

The word 'citizen' was derived from citizenship and citizenship was derived from historical relationship between the individual and his city; implying the status of freedom from accompanying responsibilities (Afolabi, 1991). Citizen as a concept has been defined in several ways by different authors and writers. Hornby (2004) defines a citizen as someone who legally belongs to a particular country and has rights and responsibilities there; whether he is living there or not. Aristotle in Afolabi (1991) defines a citizen as a person with the right to participate in both legislative and judicial functions of the political community to which he belongs. Another writer Imhabekhai (2009) perceives a citizen to mean any individual who resides and earns his/her livelihood in a particular community.

The fact is that for somebody to accede to the status of a citizen in a community, the person must have lived in the community for a good number of years either by birth or residency. The people in that community must see, know and accept him/her as one of their own.

The Concept of Participation

Hornby (2004) perceives participation to mean the act of taking part in an activity or event. It simply means taking active part in an activity. Participation means involvement or commitment to an activity accompanied by orientations and beliefs, feelings and ideas (Courtney, 1992).To participate in community development is to take part or join in an on-going activity or development project in the community.

Community Development

Community development as a concept is an amalgam of two different words; namely, community and development .For a clearer understanding of the discourse, it is imperative to define each of the two component words.

Community

Community as a concept has been defined in different ways by different authors and writers. Some define it from the geographical point of view while others define it depending on their area of specialization. Hornby (2004) defined community as a group of persons having the same religion, race, occupation, etc, or with common interest etc. Frankemberg (1975)cited in Onyeozu (2007:2) defines the term community as a territorially bounded social system within which people live, sharing common social, economic and cultural characteristics. Oni and Ohiani (1987) in Onyenemezu (2008) defines community as a territorially bounded social system within which people live in harmony, love, intimacy and share common social, economic and cultural characteristics.

From the above definitions, it can be deduced that a community is a social system where people live sharing common life, geographical location, common socio-economic, cultural and political characteristics, having a feeling of oneness and a sense of belonging which enable them to pursue one goal.

Development

Development as a concept has been defined by authors and writers from different perspectives. The economist defines it from the economic perspective, the scientist defines it from the scientific perspective, the psychologist does so from the psychological perspective, the educationist gives insights from the educational perspective etc. For the purpose of this discussion, development is perceived as improvement in the quality of socio-economic, political, cultural and environmental life of people including their life expectancy.

Community Development

United Nations as reported in Esenjor (1992) gave a concise definition of community development as:

> the process by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of the government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate those communities into life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress(P 3).

Barikor (2003) perceives community development as an integrated process by which the efforts of the citizens (i.e. the rural system) are united with those of governmental authorities and voluntary agencies to improve the social, economic and cultural conditions of the community; the very index of development posture of the nation.

Citizen participation in community development can be approached in many ways. A citizen participates in community development when he/she contributes meaningfully towards the development of the community and obeys the laws of the land. Citizen's participation is assumed to be a desired and necessary part of community development activities. This means active involvement of all citizens (men, women, youths) in the community, irrespective of age, nature of citizenship, socio-economic status, political affiliation, religion, level of education, etc in planning and implementing programs and projects that are of benefit to the people. Imhabekhai (2009) perceives citizen's participation in community development as a

process by which the people themselves or with the stimulation of an agency, initiate and execute projects/programmes by themselves or in collaboration with government and non-governmental agencies. Spiegel (1968) perceives citizen participation as the process that can meaningfully tie programmes to people. Paul (1987) defines citizen participation as a means of empowerment, building of market capacity, increasing project effectiveness, improving project efficiency and project cost sharing. Osuji (1992) perceives citizen participation in relation to development as the involvement of members of project in the community, in all stages of decision-making relating to development programme in their areas. What this means is that development programmes and projects should not be imposed on the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of development efforts. Beneficiary populations should not be made passive recipients of services; rather they should take active part in all activities concerned with improvement or development of their various communities. Nyerere (1968) cited in Osuji (1992) states that to unleash the massive human energies required to bring about broad scale development, the local people must be involved in articulating their own needs and running their own affairs.

The above assertion by Nyerere, demands that community members know what their problems are and who is who and what can be done to tackle those problems. They also know the local untapped resources (whether human or material) which they can use to move themselves out of the shackles of underdevelopment.

Citizen's participation serves as a tool for convincing the people that only they and others will reap the benefits of development project(s) in their communities. This in turn engenders readiness on the part of the citizens to place long-term goals ahead of their current needs. Christenson and Robinson (1980) reveal that citizens become involved in community affairs only when certain conditions are present or deficiencies are noted. Bellah (1985) views citizen participation in community development from the perspective of benefits to be gained and costs to be borne. Herberlein (1976) notes that public involvement in community development results in better decisions. He, however, argues that community decisions that involve citizens are more likely to be acceptable to the local people. Better community decisions should be beneficial to the average citizens of the community.

Citizen's participation in community development serves as a check and balance of political activities. Participation allows fuller access of citizens to benefits of a democratic society (Wade 1989).

Anyanwu (1981) and Oduaran (1994) view citizen's participation as implying much more than involvement; it calls forth other features; namely *democracy* or *democratic participation* and *education*. They define citizen's participation in community development as involvement of community members in the affairs or activities that are designed to enhance the development of the community. This implies active involvement of community members in the day-to-day activities of their community. Citizen's participation in community development develops pride of ownership in the people after successfully completing a community development project. They will perceive the project as 'ours' rather than 'theirs'. Oduaran (1994) states that citizen's participation in community development is educative and therefore an essential ingredient of any educational process. According to him, the lesson may be such that leads to behaviour modification or even the consolidation of the values of self-help. In its educational form, citizen's participation possesses educative psychological properties of development. Jackson (1962) and Billington (1974), contend that freedom and the right to make decisions on the early American frontiers was the shaping force in grassroots democracy, ie, people's right to participate. The point being stressed by the above writers is that the idea of citizen's participation in community development should be based

on democracy i.e. free enterprise and the rights of community members (Anyanwu, 1981).This means that every member of the community should willingly participate in the project/programme with joy.

When community members strive towards effecting a change for their well being, the point must be remembered that these individuals have inherent and legal right to humane treatment. Appeals must be made to seek their conscience and will. The ability to solicit their support to participate becomes primary ingredients of free enterprise; thereby ensuring democratic participation. Community development is democracy Anyanwu (1981). It allows individuals opinion whether to participate or not in the initiated project or programme. Cook (1975) notes that citizen's participation can legitimize the project or programme; its plans, actions, and leadership. Voluntary participation in community development can reduce the cost for personnel needed to carry out many of the duties associated with community action. Without this support, scores of worthwhile project would never be achieved in many communities.

Thus, citizens will voluntarily participate in community development activity when they have an appropriate organizational structure available to them for expressing their interest. Sills (1966) states that citizen's participation in community development can be facilitated with an appropriate organizational structure.

Oduaran (1994), Adekola and Oyebamiji (2008) and Onyenemezu (2008) emphasize the use of community structure, issue specific and good leadership in community development. Community structure accounts to a large extent, to the success of grass root projects or programme. It refers to the internal social organization of communities or the relationship existing among communities. It includes the chiefs, elders, age-grades, men and women groups, youths etc existing in our communities. In this regard, the citizens' will have vital roles to play. If they view the project/program as being cumbersome, time consuming, dictatorial or grossly inefficient, they will not be part of it, but they will withdraw after joining, or their dissatisfaction may be evidenced by high absenteeism, or general unwillingness to be supportive or cooperative. Citizens will voluntarily participate in community development projects or programmes when they see it as an important aspect of their lives, whether threatening or not. Situations that may threaten people's life styles may as well elicit citizens participation for instance construction of bridges or dam, location of solid waste facilities etc. When such situations occur, citizens often organize volunteer groups to counter efforts to establish changes. This is usually spontaneous and extensive. Whether threatening or not, the point being made are those citizens will voluntarily participate in a community development activity when they see positive benefits to be gained. The benefits can be of infinite nature. They can range from personal wants to desired ends sought by a group. They can be economic in nature or might include an activity to improve the morals of community residents. Blau (1964), Homans (1974), Cosser and Rosenburg (1970) view that people must view an activity, a proposed change, or an issue as beneficial before they participate in the activity.

Rationales for Citizen's Participation in Community Development

Calm and Camper (1968) suggest three rationales for citizen's participation in community development.

First, they suggest that merely knowing that one can participate promotes the dignity and self-sufficiency within the individual. Applying this rationale to community development means that individual's perception and consciousness promote active participation in community development projects/programme. It instills and promotes the dignity and self-sufficiency in the individual.

Secondly, participation taps the energies and resources of individual citizens within the community. This simply implies that in community development, citizens' resources (human and material) and energies are required for the actualization of the project/programme at hand. Community development is all about putting heads together in solving community problems. Citizens must be fully involved. When they are fully involved, they will be happy to provide their manpower and available resources towards the realization of the stated target.

Finally, citizen's participation provides a source of special insights, information, knowledge and experience, which contribute to the soundness of community solutions to problems.

Benefits of Citizen's Participation in Community Development

Community development itself is filled with a lot of benefits. It is only when citizens come together that they can tap those benefits. The main purpose of community development is to de-emphasize regurgitate reliance on government to bring development to communities (Ojuah, 2012). Bridges (1974) cited five advantages to be gained from active citizens' participation in community development as:

1. The citizen can bring about desired change by expressing one's desire, either individually or through a community group.
2. The individual learns how to make desired changes.
3. The citizen learns how to resolve conflicting interests for the general welfare of the group.
4. The citizen learns to understand and appreciate the individual needs and interests of all community groups.
5. The individual begins to understand group dynamics as it applies to mix groups.

Facilitating Citizen's Participation in Community Development

The Ohio State University Fact Sheet on Community Development suggests the following as possible conditions which can increase and facilitate voluntary citizen's participation in community development:

1. Citizen's participation can be facilitated by stressing the benefits to be gained. This will work so long as the benefits become obvious. The tangible and intangible benefits should be emphasized. These are the true gains of community development.
2. Citizen's participation can be facilitated with an appropriate organizational structure available for expressing interest. This may require organizing more neutral group than may be in existence in a community. However, in some situations, existing groups are adequate. Situation judgment is required by persons with appropriate experience and competency.
3. Citizen's participation can be facilitated by helping citizens find positive ways to respond when their way of life is threatened. Most people want to act responsibly. Use these situations to help people find positive ways to deal with threatening predicaments.
4. Citizen's participation can be facilitated by stressing the commitment or obligation each of us has towards improving the community. However, people will not continue to participate unless the experience is rewarding, or at least not too distasteful.

5. Crisis situations should not be invented; but if they exist, they become powerful motivation. Crisis situations have long been successfully used as basis for gaining citizen participation in community development.

CONCLUSION

Citizen's participation is an integral aspect of community development. This is so because without the citizens participating, there can never be community development. Citizen's participation in community development can therefore be improved by stressing participation benefits, organizing or identifying appropriate organizational structures for citizens to express their interests, stressing obligations each citizen has towards community development, providing citizens with better knowledge of issues and situations and finally making citizens feel comfortable in the group.

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