

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AS A TOOL FOR THE PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper examined community participation as a tool for the promotion of sustainable community development. The paper explored the concept of community participation and sustainable community development. The paper identified areas of community participation in sustainable community development to include community needs assessment, community development planning, community mobilization among others. The highlights of the benefits that accrue from community participation in sustainable community development are community empowerment, promotion of meaningful change, community participation as a mechanism to address community problems and provision of learning opportunities. The highlights of the recommendations based on the issues discussed are: There is an obvious need to strengthen the level of awareness creation in people for community participation in sustainable community development, relevant stakeholders in community development projects should embark on sustainable mobilization for effective community participation in community development among others.*

**KEYWORDS:** *community, Participation, Tool, Promotion, Sustainable, Community and Development*

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### INTRODUCTION

Community participation is a vital tool for sustainable community development which must be encouraged in all the stages of community development process, namely needs identification, community development planning, project implementation, management and evaluation. Aruma (1998) stated that participation is sought in all stages of community development project beginning from identification of project objectives to taking action based on the felt needs of the people with the concerned community. Community participation elicits the involvement or participation of people in their own community development in the society. In the views of Pratt and Boyden (1985) if people in community development are to be more, they must participate fully in their own social and economic development to enable them make their own choices instead of becoming servants of an externally-devised grand design in the society.

While commenting on the same subject, Wright (1979) remarked that the process of participation can be viewed as a technical matter because if the number of people involved in decision-making is increased, everyone will be better informed and, therefore, better decision will be the result. This re-

affirms the importance of people's involvement in the affairs of their various communities in the society.

Community participation affords people an opportunity to participate in sustainable community development projects that affect their lives. Fundamentally, in human environment where democratic ideals and principles are highly cherished, people are encouraged to express their fundamental human rights to participate in the cultural life of the community in the society. Olakanmi (2007) stated that Article XXVII of General Assembly of United Nations proclaims that everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. The implication of this is that members of various communities have the right to participate in sustainable community development projects and share in the benefits that will improve people's living conditions in the participating communities in the society. In line with this thought, Frank and Smith in Ugwu and Mbalisi (2016) affirmed that participation in community development process make community members responsible for their own development, strengthen their capacity, empower them and increase their skills, reduce ignorance, poverty and suffering, help them achieve social, economic, cultural and environmental goals and above all improve the quality of their life.

Community participation can be viewed as a collective action of people in community development to improve the living conditions of people in the participating communities in the society. Community participation as collective action of people in community development helps people to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in addressing issues of common concern in order to improve people's living conditions in various communities in the society.

### **Community Participation**

The concept of community participation can be defined as a process whereby members of participating communities mobilize themselves to participate in groups as community members for the common purpose of addressing their problems with a view to improving people's living conditions in the concerned communities. In the views of Desai (2011) community participation simply means a situation whereby people act in groups in order to influence the direction and outcome of development projects which will ultimately affect them in the society. The ultimate purpose of stimulating community participation in community development projects is to elicit adequate involvement of members of the participating communities not only in project implementation, but at various stages of community development project including decision-making process in order to improve the living conditions of people in the concerned communities.

Community participation must be goal-oriented in community development in various communities in the society. Desai (2011), stated that some people perceive participation as an end in itself and others see it as a means to achieve certain goals. Community participation in community development projects can be seen as a means to achieve goals such as effective service delivery in various communities in the society. Desai (2011) asserted that whatever the goal may be that participation shows the importance of the voice of the people in the issues that concern them in their various communities in the society. Community participation, therefore, does not only mean being involved in the implementation of community development projects, but it means eliciting ideas from members of the participating communities in order to enable them make informed decisions that will help them to take responsibilities that will ultimately improve people's living conditions in their various communities.

### **Sustainable Community Development**

The concept of sustainable community development can be defined as the process of community development initiative which helps to improve the living conditions of people on sustainable basis in the participating communities. While commenting on a similar subject, Aruma (2008) stated that the concept of sustainable development is viewed as the process of development initiative which usually leads to continuous improvement in people's living conditions in human environment. Ibori (2001) defined sustainable development as putting in place well articulated measures and programmes that will improve the living conditions of people in their various communities in the society. The focus of sustainable development initiative is on stimulating continuous process of improving people's living conditions in human environment.

The concept of sustainable community development simply means a process of meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs in various communities in human environment. While commenting on a similar subject, Todaro and Smith (2009) perceived sustainable development as a type of development which allows future generations to live at least as much as the present generation in various social settings in the society. The concern of sustainable community development is to explore how people of the present generation will live and enjoy what the day holds for them without jeopardizing the opportunities of future generations to meet their own needs in the society. This remains the central focus of sustainable development initiative in human environment (Aruma, 2015).

The concept of sustainable community development can equally be defined as a process whereby the efforts of members of the participating communities are united with those of governmental authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporate organizations (COs), institutions and other relevant stakeholders to improve the living conditions of the people of present generation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to benefit from the same opportunities to meet their own needs in various participating communities. Sustainable community development can be achieved through the instrumentality of collaborative efforts of all the relevant stakeholders in community development for the ultimate purpose of improving people's living conditions in the participating communities.

### **Areas of Community Participation in Sustainable Community Development**

The areas of community participation in sustainable community development are the followings:

#### **1. Assessment of Community Needs:**

Community participation as people's involvement in issues of common concern affords the members of various communities an opportunity to participate in the assessment of their own community needs through the instrumentality of participatory rural appraisal (PRA). Community participation promotes the active participation of people in the affairs of their local communities in order to promote sustainable community development in various communities in human environment.

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is a community assembly where all the various segments of participating communities meet to discuss issues of common concern in community needs assessment and prioritization of the identified community needs. Aruma (2017) viewed participatory rural appraisal (PRA) as community development learning process where the members of the participating communities actively participate as relevant stakeholders, project participants or project beneficiaries by coming together to explore ways of identifying their community problems with a view to prioritizing the identified problems, preparing community development plan, implementing, managing, monitoring and evaluating community development projects and programmes in order to

improve people's living conditions in the participating communities. In community needs assessment, the members of participating communities express their views about their community problems, prioritization of the identified community needs and the desirable change for improved living conditions of people in the concerned communities in the society. If people really want to achieve sustainable community development, they should stop focusing on the size of their numerous problems and start focusing on their potentialities to address their problems in order to improve their living conditions in various communities.

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is perceived as an approach or method which enables people of participating communities to express their views on their community problems and their subsequent prioritization in order to achieve improved living conditions in the concerned communities. Chambers (1994) perceived participatory rural appraisal (PRA) as an approach or a method to assist people in rural and urban communities to express, enhance, share and analyse their opinions, knowledge of life and conditions to identify their community problems, plan and implement accordingly. Interestingly, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) as a community assembly offers members of the participating communities an opportunity to express, enhance, share and analyse their views on issues of common concern with a view to prioritizing them accordingly in the concerned communities in the society.

### **Community Development Planning**

The concept of planning is an activity which takes place to guide the future actions of people in human environment. Imhabekhai (2009) asserted that planning is an activity which takes place 'today' for tomorrow. He further stated that planning is an action which is carried out now or in future in order to direct present or future action. The concept of community development planning is an activity in community development process which elicits community participation in various communities. Community development plan simply means something which people have decided to do in community development in order to improve the living conditions of people in various participating communities. Imhabekhai (2009) while quoting Jegede, viewed planning as a process of preparing a set of decisions for acting now or in the future which are directed towards achieving a goal or goals through the instrumentality of a rational selection of the best alternatives out of many alternatives. The focus of community development plan is on preparation of community development project planning that will lead to the achievement of project deliverables in the participating communities.

Community development plan can equally be defined as future course of action in community development process. Nagarajan (2010) stated that project planning is just deciding in advance what the future course of actions of a project will be in the society. The course of action of the project must be arranged sequentially to facilitate the achievement of the project deliverables in the participating communities. Community participation in community development planning involves a lot of steps. Nagarajan (2010) identified the following steps in projects planning:

- (i) Stating the objectives of the project.
- (ii) Identification of the means to achieve the objectives and goals.
- (iii) Identification of alternative course of action for achieving the objectives and goals.
- (iv) Evaluation of the resources available for use.
- (v) Evaluation of the available alternative course of action.
- (vi) Selection of the course of action that is most suitable to achieve the desired objectives and goals taking into consideration resource constraints, if any.

Imhabekhai (2009) outlined the followings which are involved in planning:

- (i) Identification or formulation of objectives of a project or programme.
- (ii) Identification of needed available human and material resources.
- (iii) Stating strategies and procedures for achieving project or programme objectives. Planning must be put in place in order to guide the implementation of project or programme that will lead to the achievement of project or programme objectives. Imhabekhai (2009) stated that planning must come before implementation if the objectives of a project or programme are to be fully achieved.

Essentially, the objective of community development projects or programmes must be concise and clearly stated. Batchelor (2010) emphasized the need for project objectives to be SMART:

S – Specific and quantifiable

M – Measurable to ensure that quality indicators are put in place.

A – Achievable within the ability of the project team and with the available resources.

R – Relevant to the current project.

T – Timetabled. Building a project timetable will help the relevant stakeholders to understand where they need to be and when to be there.

Interestingly, project plan should state project objectives and what precisely will be achieved in the course of project implementation in the participating communities.

Community participation in community development plan should involve relevant stakeholders in a particular community development project or programme in the participating community. Imhabekhai (2009), stated that planning in community development must, indeed, involve all the relevant stakeholders in a particular project or programme in the society. He further stated that men, women, youths and their leaders or accredited representatives must be adequately involved in the community development planning process. The representation of various groups through their leaders or accredited representatives of the various segments of the population becomes imperative in community development since it is obvious that not all the bonafide members of the population of a community must be virtually present to stimulate community development process that will improve people's living conditions in their various communities. However, the involvement of a good number of the project participants in community development plan will certainly guarantee to a certain extent effective implementation of community development projects that will emerge from such community development plan.

### **Community Mobilization**

The concept of community mobilization means the process in which people are encouraged to participate in mobilizing available resources for the promotion of community development in order to improve their living conditions in various communities. Imhabekhai (2009) viewed mobilization as a process of arousing the interest and consciousness of a group of people to provide effective services in community development projects or programmes which will be of benefit to them. Community mobilization is very important in order to stimulate people's consciousness and desire to promote community participation for sustainable community development that will improve their living conditions in the participating communities. Indeed, awareness creation as Freire (1985) advocated focuses on stimulating social action and co-operation as evidently seen in mobilization of people and resources for promotion of sustainable community development in various communities.

The identification of community needs through community needs assessment and the prioritization of the needs will certainly motivate the people to be involved in community mobilization for community participation in promotion of sustainable community development in various communities. A good community leader or opinion leader who is prepared to serve as the main

contact for the relevant stakeholders is important in promoting community mobilization for sustainable community development. A good representation of various segments of the population must be considered in order to ensure effective community mobilization for community participation in promotion of sustainable community development in various communities.

Community mobilization is a process of working closely with individuals or group of people to achieve a common purpose of improving people's living conditions through the instrumentality of community development. Akande (2016) defined community mobilization as the concerted efforts of the community members to promote desirable changes in their community. The ultimate concern of community mobilization is to stimulate members of various communities into action to mobilize their available scarce resources to achieve a common purpose of promoting desirable improved living conditions in the participating communities.

### **Community Development Project and Programme Implementation**

Community participation can equally be seen in community development project and programme implementation in various communities. The extent of community participation in implementation of community development projects, indeed, requires availability of adequate human and material resources that are provided to achieve the desired results in community development.

Evidently, implementation of community development projects and programmes can overtly be seen in the availability of project participants, contributions of money to finance community development projects and programmes, payment of membership fees of community based-organizations to raise funds for financing community development projects and programmes, payment of community development levy or financial contribution, provision of labour in project site in lieu of payment of community development levies or financial contributions in various participating communities. Community participation in community development project or programmes can also be seen in management and maintenance of the projects and programmes as well as provision of materials among others.

### **Benefits of Community Participation in Sustainable Community Development**

The followings are the benefits of community participation in sustainable community development in various participating communities:

1. **Community Empowerment:** An important benefit of community participation in sustainable community development is community empowerment in the participating communities. The concept of community empowerment simply means the process of helping people to acquire relevant knowledge and skills to take active part in the decision-making process, community needs assessment, planning, implementation, mobilization, training and evaluation of community development projects and programmes that will improve their living conditions in the various communities. In the views of Mulwa (2008) empowerment means building people's capacity to take active participation in their own decisions that affect their living conditions in their own communities in the society.

**Promotion of Meaningful Change for Improved Living Conditions of People:** Community participation stimulates the promotion of meaningful change to improve people's living conditions in various communities in the society. Community participation is organized to facilitate the promotion of meaningful change which comes from the people of participating communities. Mulwa (2008) stated that meaningful change has to come from the people of a community if actually the change is to remain relevant and sustainable in the participating communities. There is always a

strong commitment to ensure effective implementation of meaningful change that comes from a community through community needs assessment. Imhabekhai (2009), stated that community participation promotes and strengthens community control; and brings about positive changes in the lives of the people and the communities where the people live. This tends to indicate that community participation in community development certainly has positive impact on people of various participating communities in improving their living conditions through sustainable community development.

**Community Participation as a Mechanism to Address Community Problems:** Community participation serves as a mechanism to address community problems through co-operative efforts in various communities in the society. Indeed, community participation as a mechanism is an important benefit derivable from collectivization efforts of people to promote sustainable community development in communities. Imhabekhai (2009) affirmed while quoting Justice, Development and Peace Commission- JDPC in Ijebe-Ode that citizen participation or community participation as the case may be which is viewed as community development tool promotes individual and collective responsibility in the communities and is used to stimulate greater collaborative problem-solving mechanism to address community problems in various communities in the society. This tends to indicate the potentialities of community participation in addressing issues of common concern in various communities. The potentialities of community participation in addressing issues of common concern can clearly be illustrated in the philosophy of broom which sweeps the floor very well and better when the broom-sticks are tied together at one end that serves as the base. This is evidently illustrated further in an Igbo adage which says that “Igwe bu Ike” meaning that numerical strength is power.

**Provision of Learning Opportunities:** Community participation provides learning opportunities in human environment. People certainly learn a lot of things from the learning opportunities which community participation offers in order to be able to improve their living conditions in communities. While commenting on a similar subject, Imhabekhai (2009) asserted that citizen participation as a process provides an opportunity for people to learn from each other, unlearn bad habits and learn new ways of defending human rights and improving their living conditions in various communities. Community participation encourages participatory learning in human environment. Aruma (2007) remarks that the focus for participatory learning is to stimulate consciousness among relevant stakeholders to use participatory rural appraisal (PRA) as a good platform to explore and exploit their environment through indemnification of community problems, prioritization and community development plan for appropriate implementation of community development projects to address their problems.

### **Improvement in Peaceful Co-existence among Community Members**

Participation in community development suggests that people must work together to improve their lives. Working together improves interaction and cooperation which often produce conflicts. The writers’ experience shows that it is difficult if not impossible to avoid conflicts in community development process. This is because as Ross noted in Ugwu (2013), emphasis on participation is relevant to the poor and disadvantaged and giving greater voice to the poor is not necessarily a conflict-free activity as it raises the possibility of new tensions between project beneficiaries and excluded groups. However, involvement of community members in their own development will help them manage their conflicts as they arise in order to achieve success in the development process. When conflicts are well managed, it strengthens their relationship and peaceful co-existence is

improved. The improved interaction paves way for involvement in further community development initiatives.

### **Challenges of Community Participation as a Tool for Promotion of Sustainable Community Development**

The challenges of community participation as a tool for promotion of sustainable community development are the followings:

**Difficult Task to Organize Community Participation:** The difficult task to organize community participation remains a serious challenge of community participation as a tool for the promotion of sustainable community development in various communities. It is not an easy task to organize people to participate in contributing ideas, making decisions and taking responsibilities to promote sustainable community development in various communities in human environment. This requires conscientization of the people in the participating community as Freire (1985) advocated to reposition their thinking and perception for promotion of sustainable community development that will help to improve the living conditions of people of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to address their own needs in the society. This enables people of various participating communities to understand the inherent benefits that accrue to communities and groups as individuals through community participation.

**The Challenge of Raising Public Expectations in Communities:** The issue of raising public expectations among the people of various participating communities is another serious challenge of community participation as a tool for the promotion of sustainable community development in human environment. The mobilization of people through the instrumentality of community participation in community development raises public expectations and concerns in addressing their numerous problems which may not be achieved in their various communities. Desai (2011) rightly noted that community participation may, however, raise the public's expectations which in certain cases may not be easy to achieve. Community participation can, indeed, address the issue of public's expectations in which certain cases may be difficult to meet through the instrumentality of prioritization of the community needs during participatory rural appraisal (PRA).

**The Challenge of Time Constraint:** Time constraint equally remains a challenge to organize and sustain community participation for promotion of sustainable community development in various communities. In the views of Dssai in (2011) community participation, indeed, takes time to organize and sustain the society. The desire for community participation which takes time to organize is very rewarding to ensure effective promotion of sustainable community development.

### **CONCLUSION**

The ultimate purpose for promoting community participation is to stimulate people-oriented participation or popular participation that will bring about improved living conditions of people through the instrumentality of sustainable community development initiatives in various participating communities. Community participation helps people of various participating communities to build strong confidence and courage to address issues of common concern in their communities. The issue of community participation as a technical matter demands that when more people are involved in decision-making process that concerns community development that better decisions are made for the ultimate benefit of improving people's living conditions in their communities. The members of



various communities through the instrumentality of community participation certainly overcome the forces that militate against them when they engage in community participation to address their problems in their community. Community participation in community development will stimulate sustainability of community development projects and programmes. Community participation in community needs assessment, planning, mobilization, implementation, training and evaluation for effective management, maintenance and sustainability of community development projects and programmes becomes imperative in order to guarantee sustainable community development in various communities in the society.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussion on community participation as a tool for promotion of sustainable community development, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is an obvious need to strengthen the level of awareness creation in people for community participation in sustainable community development in various communities. It is obvious that when concerned people have better understanding of community development projects and programmes that they will certainly participate in them to improve their living conditions in their various communities.
2. There should be concerted efforts by relevant stakeholders in community development projects and programmes to embark on sustainable mobilization for effective community participation in community development. The information made available to people through awareness creation will enable them to develop interest in the community development projects and programmes. This will, however, enable people to take decision on whether to participate in community development projects and programmes or not in their communities.
3. There should also be concerted efforts to ensure that community participation is conceptualized for sustainability of community development projects and programmes from community development planning stage. This will guarantee the sustainability of community development projects and programmes in various communities.
4. There should be a strong community development policy that community participation must be encouraged to promote sustainable community development in communities. The community development policy will encourage people in various communities to engage in community participation in order to ensure that community development projects and programmes are born out of genuine community needs and planning of the concerned people of various communities in the society.

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