EDUCATION, SELF-HELP AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGER STATE

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ABSTRACT

Community development education of rural communities is a vital tool for self-help activities and rural development. In general terms, it concerns not only the provision of amenities and basic infrastructure for the people but also to help respond to community felt-needs in a sustainable manner. Overall, it is intended to improve the living conditions of the people and above all achieving development goals. This paper examines the contribution of education (the so-called western education) to community development through the physical infrastructure initiatives of the inhabitants of such communities. Emphasis is on spatial context of such community self-help projects that were initiated, planned and implemented for the benefit of all. Two communities were compared with regard to their educational attainment and how it affects community development of the areas. It describes the projects embarked upon by the communities and the relationship this has with the level of education of their inhabitants. It further discussed the way forward towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) particularly as it relates to rural areas within the framework of overall development paradigm.

KEYWORDS: - community / development / education / infrastructures / people

Introduction

Human settlements (both rural and urban) in which people live and work, provide the social, economic and physical context which facilitate or impede their ability to generate and increase income and spatial development for the overall interest and benefit of the communities. Community involvement in human settlements development must be viewed against the background of several contemporary trends. First, the increasing high fertility and a massive rural-urban migration particularly in the third world countries like Nigeria have been a source of concern to government and other stakeholders. The public sector has been the sole provider of an enabling environment for work and other livelihood activities especially in the poor urban areas in northern Nigeria. Hence the people have the strong belief that it is the responsibility of government to provide their basic needs including development infrastructure (Brown, 1979). In southern Nigeria which has a longer history of western education; the people embraced the spirit of community development through self-help early enough and long before uncontrolled urbanization that characterized post-independent Nigeria.

In recognition of the poor results of the public sector direct involvement in development process, governments of third world nations are constantly being advised and encouraged to give the kind of leadership that will promote the involvement and active participation of the people in community development programmes. In this regard, the UN–Habitat, through the Global Strategy for Shelter which promotes an enabling role for government and describes the basic elements for a cooperative in which all actors are involved, has emphasized that governments do not have the financial and administrative resources to respond directly to the human settlement needs particularly of the poor. In fact, the global economic depression and the consequent fluctuations in government revenues make it increasingly difficult for governments to meaningfully satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of the people. Furthermore, experience shows that the participation of the people in the community effort to develop offers the best hope to providing basic needs.

Education liberates man from ignorance and disease, in the sense that it equips individuals and the society at large, with the necessary mental and social understanding of nature and to use the knowledge for the advancement of humanity. Self help on the other hand brings out in harmony all the different physical, social and intellectual possessions of members of a community or an association for common good. Hence, it can be said that education enhances community effort towards improving its physical structures and attributes. This is usually attainable with progressive increases in social capital accumulation. Social capital is people's attitudes, societal norms and pride in terms of the community's perception of their integrity; level of trust among the communities and network of civic engagement are important factors which can help or hinder the mobilization of resources, their employment situation and the variation in the general level of living (Putnam 1993; Mabogunje, 1999; cited in Olayiwola, 2002). This was further highlighted as the presence and harmonious co-existence of 'a network of community based organizations (CBOs) such as cultural associations, association of small-scale industrialists, ethnic groups, age grades, the chamber of commerce, cooperative societies, etc'; which are geared towards the progress of their immediate community. The inadequacy or the total absence of these commendable qualities has meant that the residents of our major cities have very limited sense of ownership and pride in the city. And the indifference in attitudes toward developing our social capital has been responsible for the socially unintegrated nature of our cities and regions (Mabogunje, 1999).

Community development through self-help efforts is a rural development strategy that has been widely embraced throughout Nigeria. Concern for the poverty and underdevelopment of rural communities in Nigeria has given rise to several rural development efforts and programmes. One of such is the response by the people themselves to grass-roots development through self help initiatives and the harmonisation of community efforts. Although these efforts in community development in Nigeria date back to the pre-colonial era; with the advent of political independence in 1960, there was the dare need to reduce the in-balance in development between urban and rural areas through the provision of amenities and rapid improvements in the level and quality of social services. Also, following widespread food insecurity and hunger, poverty, ill health, etc; greater attention has long been drawn to community development programmes. Hence, public authorities are constantly being advised to give the kind of leadership that will promote the involvement and active participation of the people in community development programmes.

It is now necessary to establish the capacity of rural communities by highlighting the educational levels and showing how community developments efforts of the people are related to that factor. This way, it would become possible to make recommendations to both government and the communities as to better ways of harnessing the development potentials in the local communities. In this regard; community development would essentially contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Hence, this paper highlights the various physical and social development and innovations attributed to two communities through self-efforts. The communities differ in terms of the level and number of not only literate members but the presence of those who have the opportunity to have gone beyond average educational levels in different and diverging fields of human endeavours. The paper therefore brings to the notice of community leaders, local stakeholders and especially government at all levels, the basic role of providing social infrastructure (especially educational) at the grassroots for sustainable development to be achieved by the people themselves. That is, the role of the government at this age of inclusive democracy is to provide the basic and the necessary infrastructure for such development to be effected according to the wishes of the people.

The aim of this paper is to determine the educational levels and the impact on community development efforts in Bussu and Dutsu communities.

The following objectives are pursued in order to achieve the stated aim.

i.   To determine the educational levels (through out-put generation) in the study area;

ii.   To identify and document community development efforts in each of the community areas;

iii.   To identify the operational modalities and problems of community self-help in sourcing for funds; and the execution of community development projects.

iv.   To make recommendations for the promotion of grass-root development through community development efforts.

Methodology

Sources of Data: The primary data were collected on the different educational levels and output in the sample areas. Secondary information was however generated on the community development associations, types of development projects embarked upon by such associations, sources of funding for the execution of these development projects, and the problems encountered in the planning and the execution of the development projects. The secondary data utilized here came from agencies such as the National Population Commission (NPC), and Community Development Office at the Local Government Level.

Sample areas through which primary data was collected and analysed for this study are the two communities of Bussu and Dutsu in Lavun and Mokwa Local Government Areas of Niger State, respectively.

Sampling procedure: the data collection method was detailed field surveys carried out through interviews and focus group discussion with the indigenes of the communities.

Method of Data Analysis: The data subjected to simple descriptive statistical techniques for analysis and the results are presented as percentages, frequency tables, bar and pie charts, etc.

The concept of community development

Community development is viewed as an educational process in its entirety. Perhaps it was for this reason that the community development process is clearly seen as educational and emphasizes the outcomes of learning in terms of people's lives, value systems and competence (Biddle et al 1966; Adegbola, 1974; Anyawu, 1981; Adekoya, 1984). The Ashridge Conference on Social Development (1945); defined community development as a movement designed to promote better living for the community with the active participation and on the initiative of the community members themselves. Similarly, the Cambridge Summer Conference of African Administration (1984), gave the so-called Cambridge

definition of community development as "a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community, but if the initiative is not forth coming spontaneously, some suitable techniques can be used to arouse and stimulate it in the people in order to ensure their active and enthusiastic response to the movement".

In Asia, the Middle East and Africa, national community development programmes are undertaken as part of a strategy for rural development. Among the concerns of the programme is the social and economic upliftment of the rural areas. Thus, it seeks to realize by building rural infrastructure, improving water supply and stimulating the demand for social services, increasing agricultural productivity and developing human resources too. The emphasis of community development connotes the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economy, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress (UN, 1971). This complex process is made up of two essential elements: the participation of the people themselves in efforts to improve their living with as much reliance as possible on their own initiatives; and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help. It is expressed in programmes designed to achieve a wide variety of specific improvements.

According to (UN, 1971) a successful community development programme stresses the following basic elements, among others;

i.   The activities must correspond to the basic needs of the community; the projects should be initiated in response to the expressed needs of the people;

ii.   Community development should aim at increasing and improving the participation of people in community affairs;

iii. The identification, encouragement and training of local leadership should be a basic objective in any community development programme;

iv.   The resources of voluntary non-government organizations (NGOs) should be fully utilized in all community development programmes.

Functions and Processes of Community Development: It has been noted that the function of community development is education for action and progress. For, it can equip the community with the ability to admit and identify common problems, accumulate the

knowledge essential to their solution, plan and also follow a course of action leading to the achievement of better results (Burke, 1966). Accordingly, there are three principles of which community development is based:

a.   Self-help;

b.   Attention to the felt-needs of the community; and

c.   Attention to the development of the community as an integrated whole.

Thus, it can be seen that community development is both a process and a movement. As a process, community development lays strong emphasis on what happens to the people psychologically in the course of the community developmental activities. Individuals in this process are assisted through organized effort to acquire the attitudes, skills and concepts required for their effective participation in programmes designed to promote their well being. Community development as a process of social actions in which people of the community organize themselves for planning action, define their common goals and individual needs and solve their problems, execute these plans with the maximum reliance upon community resources and supplement these resources when necessary with services and materials from governmental and non-governmental agencies outside the community. Thus, community development is a problem-solving process. It helps citizens grow in competence for the corporative solutions of their community problems. It also helps them not only to become more effective in their participation in solving the problems of their community, but it also aids them to develop the skills, assesses the relative importance of problems confronting them and to further select appropriate options open to them. In the final analysis, community development is not necessarily the physical improvement within the community, but rather the changes which have taken place within the people themselves in the process, (Oyebamiji, 1991; Thomas Jones; cited in Oyebamiji, 1991).

As a movement, community development is seen as involving movement from one point of dissatisfaction to a point of satisfaction in the life of the community; stresses the idea being interpreted and promoted by members of the community; and fosters the arousal of a sense of cohesion, purpose and achievement among these citizens. This way, community development becomes a weapon for social change whose objectives is the attainment of better living for the people, Oyebamiji (1991). By implication; what is central to community development as a movement is firstly; the getting together of the people to bring their community on the path of progress. The essence of the idea is to organize self-help by the people and for the people.

Secondly the people must be free to achieve their own betterment and they must actively want and be able to do this (Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 2000).

The totality of community development process and movement is embedded in the principle of citizen participation, which enjoys whatever is done to improve the welfare of the people. The local people should take part in the planning, execution, utilization and assessment of the social amenities or facilities designed to improve their welfare. It is this type of participation that gives people the pride of ownership of the facilities acquired through community development and or government efforts that involve them.

The Location and Socio-Economic Characteristics

Niger state lies approximately between latitude 8° 10' and 11° 30' N and longitudes 4° 30' and 7° 15'E and has a population of 3,950,242 which is about 2.82% of the country's total population, Nigeria Masterweb (2007). The state is largely agrarian in nature and majority of the inhabitants live in rural areas.

Bussu community: The community is located in Lavun Local Government Area of Niger State. It lies about 9km east of Doko community and about 17km South of Bida town. Rice cultivation is the basis of the local economy. However, other crops such as guinea corn, millet groundnut, beans and root crops are also cultivated. Based on 1991 census figure, projected population is about 5,082.

Dutsu Village: Dutsu community is located in Mokwa Local Government Area of Niger State on the elevated platform within the flood plains of River Niger and about 30km south of Bida. Their main source of income is fishing. However, with the dwindling fisheries resources in the area, the community have embraced farming particularly rice cultivation on the lower plains (Fadama). Projected population is about 6,767 based on 1991 census figures.

**Educational Level and Community Development in the Selected Community Areas**

Introduction of Western Education in the Sample Areas: The primary concern of the colonial administration was to harness the agricultural and mineral resources of the country (Moughalu, 1986). The administration, however, made efforts to provide institutional and infrastructural facilities to boost agriculture, essentially to facilitate the realization of their imperialist objectives. There was thus the development of the transport infrastructure, the distribution of farm inputs and the building of schools and hospitals, which catered for the children and families of the colonial workers and elites in the community. The education and

health of the people were of no primary importance to the colonialist (except in the case of the Christian missionaries).

Bussu community had the opportunity of early contact with the Christian missionary activities due to close proximity and easy access to Doko Missionary activities. Doko Missionaries and their activities were quite pronounced even before national independence in 1960; and further expanded to other communities like Gaba which was given a primary school in 1951. Bussu community took this advantage and unlike Dutsu community which is relatively far from Gaba and constantly face the problem of inaccessibility due to regular floods from rivers Niger and Gbako. Perhaps, only the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (U.P.E) in 1976, gave Dutsu the chance to acquire western education. This wide disparity has greatly influenced the two communities in all areas of human endeavours. This can be seen in; for example, educational attainment, religious diversity, community enlightenment, and skilled man-power structure and composition; which have strong influence on social capital formation and sustenance. This further explained noticeable presence of indigenous Christian population in Bussu community and a total absence in Dutsu community. See figure 1.

Educational Attainment

In table 1, level of education attainment is presented for each of the two communities. From the field work, 6.4% percent of those that attended primary school in Bussu compared to Dutsu community (60.2%) could not further their education beyond primary school level. At the secondary school level the former had 65.4% graduates and the latter 31.8%. For the tertiary level it is 28.2% and 8.0% respectively.
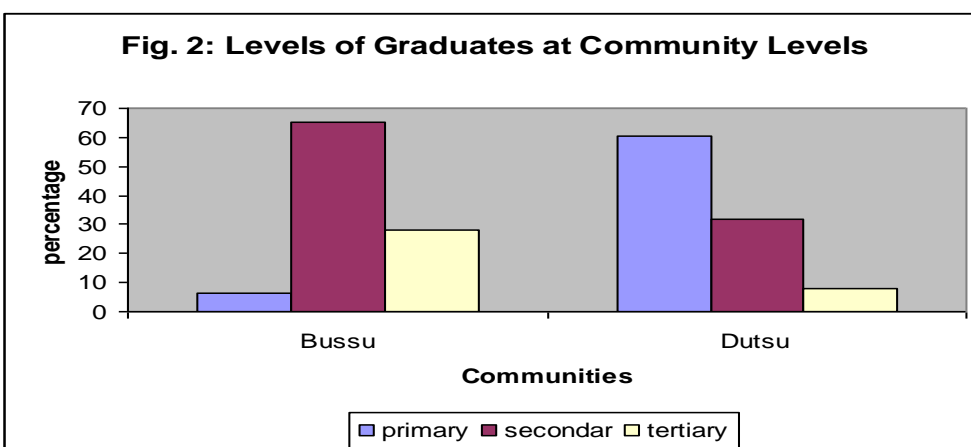
Fig. 1: Relationship between population and religion in the study area
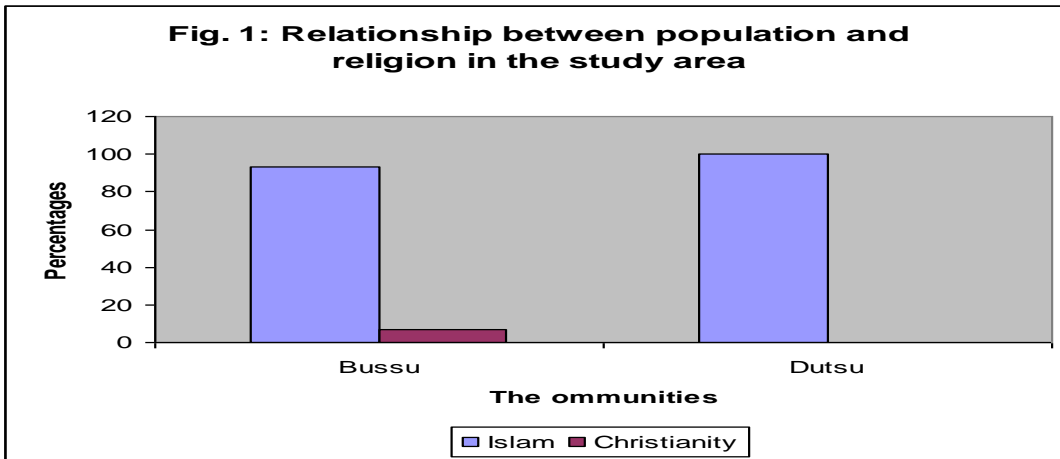
Table 1: Educational Attainment in the Study Area (Number of Graduates)

Level o education	Bussu		Dutsu	
	Freq.	**Percentage**	**Freq.**	**Percentage**
Primary	23	6.4	127	60.2
Secondary	236	65.4	67	31.8
Tertiary	102	28.2	17	8.0
Total	**361**	**100**	**211**	**100**

A look at figure 2 shows that as more and more graduates turn out from primary schools in Dutsu community, less and less are willing to further their education beyond primary school level. This is not the case in Bussu community, which recorded high tendency for further studies beyond primary level.

Fig. 2: Levels of Graduates at Community Levels

Community Development in the Study Areas

Community self-help projects had been undertaken by the people of the two communities as far back as the pre-colonial era. However, the efforts were mainly in the construction and maintenance of walkways and roads, clearing of public land, market places and safe guarding of communal resources. However, in the last two decades, the scope of operation has been enlarged and the scope and mode of operation diversified; whereas in the past the equipments in used were simple hoes, cutlasses, diggers and shovels – to carry-out works for the immediate community; today, more complex and multifunctional activities are embarked upon with little assistance from outside. Where the government was involved at all, it was for the sole purpose of taking our completed projects for operation and maintenance. This is the case with the Bussu Rural Hospital. Interestingly, the landmark achievements by Bussu Community during the course of field survey were largely lacking in Dutsu Community except for the central mosque which was constructed and already put to use in 1995. See table 2.

Table 2: Bussu Community Projects

Type of project	Year initiated	Year completed	Funding			
			Gov't	Community	NGO	Individuals
Central mosque	1984	1991	-	75%	-	25%
Church	1986	1992	-	60%	-	40%
Rural Hospital	1993	1999	10%	85%	-	5%
Police Outpost	1999	On-going				
A Block Of two classroom	2001	On-going				
Community Bank	2001	On-going		100%		

Source: fieldwork November, 2006

Findings

Two distinct and independent communities, though within the same geographical areas, were studied to ascertain if education level could impact on the physical environment of a community employing community self-help strategy. From the analysis carried out, the research revealed that the level of community development attainments depends on the numbers and educational attainment of members of such community. Bussu community has registered community development activities championed by the educated elites of the community. The level of exposure of such communities to relatively more developed communities outside them served as a catalyst to development impetus for communities desiring improvement in their environment and living conditions. In addition, the extent to

which the innovations and ideas were adopted is to a large extent a function of the level of educational attainment of any community.

Distance is indeed a factor in educational attainment. In the case of Dutsu community, the high level of graduates at primary school without furthering their studies (that is, western educational pursuit) is attested to by long distance from growth centres compared to Bussu community which is relatively closer to these growth centres. All things being equal, an area nearest to a growth centre receive the innovation first so that while this area is already implementing the idea, areas farther way from the centre are yet to receive and adopt same idea.

The employment level of a community is largely dependent on the educational attainment of members such communities. It appears Dutsu community lacks this advantage and is negatively affecting the physical and social fabric of the community. This can be attested to by increasing remittance of part of the income of members of the community in diaspora. This is a global issue and is recognized that 'diaspora communities play a crucial role in international development through political advocacy, transferring skills or sending money home'. And counting just recorded remittances sent home by migrants from developing countries, we anticipate a rise to $199 billion in2006, up from $188 billion in 2005. Including unrecorded flows through formal and informal channels, the true size of remittances is even larger, making them the largest source of external financing in many developing countries (Dunk 2006; Ratha, 2006).

The low level financial assistance from the government and the incapacitation of community members are enough to dampen the morale and enthusiasm of the local communities in organising self help or calling for assistance from often distant authorities. Another   main finding of this study is the rather wide variation in the level of involvement of the two communities in development efforts through self-help. Distance and difficult physical terrain in the Dutsu community area could have contributed to this variation.

Inferences

The paucity of material resources available to government at all levels particularly in third world countries makes it increasingly difficult to develop and manage the increasing human resources and their needs. It has thus become almost impossible for either the federal, state or

local government to meet their constitutional obligations to the populace, hence the call on communities to engage in self-help development project to supplement the meagre effort of governments. Community development programmes give the people the opportunity to determine what is good for them thereby achieving a sound development that will not destroy the cultural and traditional values of the people. When people participate in their development, they see the whole effort, not as government work or business, but as theirs too.

Community participation reduces cost and helps in achieving effective mobilization of the available human, financial and material resources. It is also important in promoting community development programmes; the people are not only answering the calls by the government but also helping the government to build a strong nation. However, government must continue to provide the enabling environment for the people to participate thereby people oriented development. An environment that is characterized by participatory democracy is one which is not only inclusive, but home-grown and recognises local peculiarities.

Recommendations

From the findings above, three things are clear for achieving sustainable development in rural areas. One; it is becoming increasingly difficult for public authorities and other stakeholders to reach out to scattered rural communities often times difficult to access. The cost of providing basic services and infrastructure is usually enormous when the communities are not within reach and lack the necessary threshold population. The level of illiteracy is still high in rural areas and this is an inhibiting factor for innovation diffusion.

Effective and meaningful development of the local communities through self-help approach requires both intensive and extensive assistance from the stakeholders within and outside the communities with the government taking the lead. Hence; government should give the kind of leadership that will promote the active participation of the people in community development programmes. Machineries and equipment as well as technical manpower are important to these communities are rather than any financial assistance or grant in aid which is the usual approach. Hence, there is the need to put in place a framework that is devoid of government bureaucratic procedures, which will facilitate easy access of needy communities to these equipment and technical manpower.

The diversification of community resources base is imperative in order to make funds available for self-help projects. Community development through rural industrialization should be a major concern of government in effort to create employment opportunities in the rural areas and thereby stem the tide of rural–urban drift especially by the youth.

Government should take the lead by reaching out to the rural communities by providing educational infrastructures with ease of access at least to primary and secondary schools. This will encourage parents and students to further their studies and expose them to beneficial innovations and ideas together with their subsequent adoption. Also, community education and conscientization of the populace is important to enable them appreciate and tackle their problems with vigour and commitment in a democratic setting. In so doing, all segments of the community would be adequately represented from the initiation to completion and monitoring stages of community development projects. The absence of this creates a total lack of commitment on their part to guard, utilize and sustain such projects.

As communities are continuously striving to improve their living conditions, governments at all levels should strengthen appropriate education of communities towards creating enabling environment for development. That is, continuous investment in human capital and basic social infrastructure is paramount especially in rural communities, which lack the financial strength to initiate such project no matter how important it is to their continued well being and survival.

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