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MEMBERSHIP PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABILITY OF GOVERN- MENT-DRIVEN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN ABIA STATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Membership participation has become a veritable strategy for empowerment in the development scene. The participation of community members in development activities enhances capacity building. Sustainable development has to do with participatory development, human development and environmental protection. This study examines participation of community members and sustainability of government-driven rural development projects in Abia State of Nigeria. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in the study. The sample comprised of 6 communities from 6 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the state. The focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were the instruments for data collection. The sample size used in the study was 72 FGD participants and 6 IDI respondents. Data generated for the study were analyzed in quotes. The study revealed that all the rural communities under study have benefited from government projects. It also shows that the executed projects have impacted on the quality of lives of the people. Furthermore, the study revealed that membership participation in the execution of projects is low and this has implications in project sustainability.

Keywords: development, government-driven projects, membership participation, participation, rural development, sustainability.

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1. Introduction

This paper explores issues underlying the sustainability of government-driven rural development projects and argues that if rural development projects are to be sustained, we must, among other things:

- advocate for the inclusion of the community members in decision-making processes;
- advocate for membership participation in all spheres of the project in the development process;
- focus more on embarking on projects that address the felt needs of the benefiting communities;
- adopt an effective monitoring of projects from inception to completion.

One of the major challenges of developing countries such as Nigeria is how to improve the quality of life of the citizens. Over 1.15 billion people in developing countries live below the poverty line (US \$350 per annum) and the majority of them reside in rural areas which constitute about 80% of their national population (World Bank, 2000). Development implies an increase in the capacity of a people to produce, to enable them to solve their own problems and meet their own needs. This capacity is inherent in the people, and depends on a people's outlook, knowledge and training to solve problems posed by their environment by the systematic use of scientific methods (Ngoddy, 1991). Rural development emphasizes the development of the moral, social, political and economic potentialities of rural communities to enhance their economic self-reliance through the provision of appropriate infrastructures such as pipe borne water, electricity supply, good roads, small scale industries, medical facilities, increase in political consciousness and participation and promotion of their moral and social wellbeing (Ezeani and Atodo, 2010). It is all about positive change and overall transformation of the rural environment.

In spite of the laudable development programs developed by the past and present government, such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Directorate for Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and the National Economic Empowerment Strategy (NEEDS), among others, which are channeled towards rural development, this objective has remained a mirage as evidenced in the wanton rural – urban migration, lack of basic social amenities and low income level.

Rural development policies and programs in Nigeria mostly emanated from the top and, in most cases, the central bureaucracy continues to dominate rural policy decision-making (Okafor, 2003). The community members at the grass-roots level are excluded from rural policy decision-making processes. Eboh (1995) observed that the strategies for achieving rural development in Nigeria include investing in human development to alleviate poverty, human misery and stabilize population, ensuring food security through rural compensation measures, creating incentives for community growth and employment by improving access to production resources and

institutional services, empowering rural people via participatory rural community oriented development that is woven around local principles, skills and technologies and protecting the environment by generating and facilitating appropriate resource management systems.

Successive governments have established special development agencies for rural development in Nigeria (Ibeanu, 2008). These agencies have commissioned various projects in the rural areas. In spite of the existence of government driven-rural development projects, there appears to be insufficient field-based information regarding the impacts on the goal of sustainable development. The paper addresses the following research questions:

- i. What are the government-driven rural development projects in the study area?
- ii. What is the level of involvement of the community members in the execution of government-driven projects?
- iii. What are the impacts of government-driven rural development projects on the quality of life of the community members?
- iv. What is the capacity of the community members regarding the sustainability of government-driven rural development projects?

Providing answers to the research questions have broad development implications and could enhance practices and policy formulation to address the challenges of sustainable rural development. The paper follows through in-depth explanation of application of theories to the study, the methodology adopted, results from the field, discussion of findings, effects of lack of membership participation, implication of the study to other developing countries, conclusions and recommendations to foster sustainability of government-driven rural projects in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical framework

Several theories have been put forward for the explanation of rural development. However, we are concerned with community members' participation and sustainability of rural development projects. To this end, we consider models such as the social action model, the diffusion model and the social planning model inadequate for explaining and understanding community participation and sustainability of government-driven rural development projects.

In spite of the weakness of the existing models, this study does not intend to develop a new approach, model or theory but to select the most suitable one for this study. Therefore, we consider the locality participation model and the system theory as appropriate for this study. Rothmans (1979) described the locality participation model as a self-help approach to rural development. The model advocates for a broad participation of a wide spectrum of the local people in terms of determining goals and actions in rural development. Through effective participation, the individual personalities become transformed. Omoruyi (2001) and Igboke and Enwere (2001) observed that participation of community members in rural development occurs when the change

agent and members of the community share in the formulation and execution of proposals or plans and programs designed to bring about improvement in the living situation of the community. Participation stipulates that the local people should take part in the planning, utilization and assessment of the social amenities or facilities designed to enhance their quality of lives. It is such participation that gives people the pride of ownership of the projects completed in the process of rural development.

The locality participation model addresses the felt needs of the rural communities through the effective participation of the local people. It is a non-directive approach to rural development that emphasizes the need for self-help, self-determinacy and self-reliance. The model provides for voluntary cooperation, development of indigenous leadership and attainment of educational objectives.

Different individuals in the same community may have different interests and may not necessarily want to participate in development projects (Nampila, 2005). However, with community participation, the people decide, act and reflect on their actions as conscious subjects. Involving the community members in rural development and empowering them has the potential to enhance their quality of lives and foster development (Kakumba and Nsingo, 2008). The participation of the local people in decision-making processes on issues that affect them provides for indigenous knowledge.

The Asian Development Bank (2006) found that the locality participation model through the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) was used to mobilize the people in water projects in Sri Lanka. Tasks are divided among the men, women and the youth in the community. For example, sanitation, security and maintenance, among others, involve all the groups in the community. Social groups such as age-grades, men, women and youth groups are formed. This is for easy access to the members of the group when community development tasks are carried out. Sanctions are applied against defaulters in the community for failure to participate in community development tasks. Rewards are also given for good performance. This is a source of motivation for community members.

The inclusion of participation elements in development assistance was included by the World Bank in their social investment fund (Narayah and Ebbe, 1997). Initially, focusing on targeting these projects has moved towards a more holistic attempt at inducing participation through institutions that organize the poor and build their capabilities to act on their own interest (Narayan, 2002).

However, the weakness of this model revolves around the fact that sometimes, for one reason or the other, the community members may dislike and reject the change agent's non-directive approach. It could be that the people do not want to shoulder the responsibility of thinking and deciding for themselves.

Systems theory could also be used to explain participation of community members in rural development. The idea of systems implies the interdependence of parts and sub-parts for the effective performance of the whole system (Das and Choudhury, 1997). The central assumption of the theory is that all social, economic, and

political phenomena are interrelated. They affect each other for the survival of the whole. Hanson (1995) argues that the value of systems theory is that it deals with 'wholes' rather than parts of humans or sections of a community as other theories do.

The effective interaction between the government agencies and community members in rural development projects makes it possible for rural communities to experience comprehensiveness in rural development projects. It also helps to ensure that contractors handling the projects are effectively monitored. This development helps to ensure the delivery of standard projects that impact meaningfully on the quality of life of the people. It also gives the community members the pride of ownership of completed projects because they were part and parcel of it.

The systems theory could be used in studies on social institutions, organizations and communities, among others. Warren (1977) posits that the theory has come to be used not only in the analysis of small groups and formal organizations, but also in the analysis of small groups and formal organizations called communities, which constitute the area of operation of many organizations/community development workers.

The weakness of the theory is the optimization and ideological assumptions that most systems are the same (Hudson, 1998). Moreover, there is also an 'assumed equilibrium' which the theory considers that all systems possess for the effective functioning of the social system.

From the above arguments it is clear that, though the government through the execution of rural development projects has the capacity to transform the rural areas, the projects can only impact meaningfully when the necessary functional support of the community members is sought.

3. Case and methodology

The field work focused on 3 selected government agencies that have executed numerous rural development projects in Abia State. The three agencies are: Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS). The DFRRI, NDDC and NEEDS, respectively, were launched in 1986, 2000 and 2003.

Seventy-eight respondents participated in the field work. The respondents were drawn from the benefiting rural communities. From each of the three senatorial zones in the state, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were purposively selected based on the fact that they benefited from the government agencies under study. According to Ekpo and Olaniyi (1995), and Dafione (2007), these agencies have recorded some qualitative achievements in the area of project execution.

The selected LGAs for the study were: Bende and Ohafia from Abia North Senatorial zone, Umuahia North and Ikwuano from Abia Central Senatorial zone, as well as Abia North, and Ukwu East from Abia South Senatorial zone. Moreover, the six communities that were purposely selected for the study include Ozuitem from Bende LGA, Okagwe from Ohafia LGA, Ohuhu from Umuahia North LGA, Oloko from Ik-

wuano LGA, Osusu from Aba North LGA and Ohanku from Ukwu East LGA. Three of the FGD sessions were for female members, while the remaining three sessions were for male members. The female FGD participants were civil servants, housewives and traders. Similarly, the male FGD participants were traders, farmers and cabinet members.

Data collection was done with six trained research assistants. The research assistants were people with adequate education (holders of first degree) and knowledge of the local environment to ensure efficiency. The data collection was done between January and April, 2013. The data collection was focused on community members' participation and sustainability of government-driven rural development projects with emphasis on:

- knowledge of projects;
- community members' participation;
- level of involvement in decision-making;
- impacts of the projects;
- project sustainability.

The qualitative method for data collection was employed. The instruments used in generating data were focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). The instruments were consensually drawn up by the authors to ensure standardization and collective understanding of what all questions entail. The FGD and IDI guides had 8 questions each, with the same number of probes. Questions and probes in the research instruments spanned through knowledge of government-driven projects in the community. Decisions reached before conception of projects, participation of community members in projects, projects and promotion of quality of life of community members and, finally, projects' sustainability. For example, one of the questions sought to find out whether the projects have impacted on the quality of life of the community members. Six FGD sessions were conducted in six communities selected from the six LGAs under study. Each of the FGD session was made up of twelve participants. Moreover, six (IDIs) sessions were held. Leaders from the six communities under study were separately interviewed.

4. Findings

4.1. Knowledge of rural development projects

Does the government embark upon rural development projects? Emerging from the focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) data, it is evident that there exist government-driven rural development projects in the communities under study. On the balance, there exist at least two successfully executed government projects in each of the six communities under study. The community members reported that government projects vary from one community to the other. They also reported that in some communities, some of the projects were still on-going. The community leaders were also aware of government-driven rural development projects in

their area. One participant stated:

'The government projects in our community include skill acquisition center, schools, roads, and electricity. Whereas the skill acquisition center and school projects have been completed, others are still on-going.' [Female trader, Osusu]

Another revealed:

'I know that water bore hole/reservoir, road, health center and solar energy electrification projects in my community were executed by the government. What I do not know is the level of government that executed the projects.' [Male farmer, Ohanku]

Another was of the opinion that:

'They have succeeded in completing a school project and a road that leads to it in our community. Their cottage hospital and water projects are still on-going. Work on these projects appears to be very slow.' [Housewife, Oloko]

The participants reported that some of the government projects in their communities were abandoned after inception. They maintained that such projects could not be counted as government projects in the community. When asked what led to the abandonment of the projects by the government, one community leader responded:

'(...) two projects they started in our community have been abandoned. On the other hand, the contractor handling the 'Isiugwu' road project told us that they are waiting for release of funds from the government. The contractor handling the water borehole project said the project site was the problem. According to him, the project was wrongly cited.' [Community leader, Okagwe]

4.2. Community members' participation in project execution

Data shows that community members' participation in government-driven rural development project is low. FGDs and IDIs with the community members and leaders revealed that decisions on projects to be embarked upon are taken by the government. This implies that the community members are excluded from participating in decisions affecting the projects. When the FGD participants were asked who decides on projects to be embarked upon by the government in the community, one revealed:

'They do not involve us when deciding on projects. Often, they just come into the community with their contractors to commence a project. The assessment and planning are done at their office; they only come into the community to stamp the projects.' [Housewife, Oloko]

Another said:

'The problem with the government is that they do not involve the community members in decision-making processes on projects to be executed. To them, we are beggars that have no choice. Their project is a free gift and so we have to accept it.' [Male cabinet member, Ozuitem]

Yet another revealed:

‘Obviously, the government does not involve us in decision-making processes on rural development projects. They decide on projects and send their workers to execute them. In fact, they do not need our input in decision-making processes. Yes, I cannot comment on our level of involvement in decision-making processes because we are not part of it.’ [Female trader, Osusu]

There is also evidence that community members do not participate in the execution of government rural development projects. Whereas some of the rural development projects are directly executed by the government parastatals or agencies, others are given to contractors. The community members only contribute in the execution of the projects as hired laborers. Most of the community members spoke of their non-participatory stance in the execution of government projects in their communities. One asserted:

‘The truth is that we are not in any way involved in their project execution. There is no consultation between the government and the community on rural development projects. Some of them see us as primitive men and women who have nothing to offer.’ [Male farmer, Ohanku]

One of the leaders reflects:

‘We have zero participation when it comes to government projects in our community. In most cases, we only know of the projects when the contractor come to inform us that the projects have been awarded to them. There is no monitoring and evaluation of the projects. They do whatever they like in the name of project execution. For example, in a 6 classroom project, they may decide to construct 3 or 4 classrooms and leave the rest.’ [Community leader, Ozuitem]

4.3. Impacts of government-driven rural development projects

There is evidence that the government rural development projects have impacted the quality of lives of the community members. The people saw the projects as big relief and free gifts from the government. The community members enumerated the projects that have impacted on their quality of lives to include rural electrification, cottage hospitals/health centers, schools, water and road projects among others. The FGD participants responded by commenting on how the projects have impacted on their quality of lives.

One participant stated:

‘The electricity project in our community has reduced the cost of cassava processing. Now, we process cassava at an affordable price and many women are in the business.’ [Housewife, Oloko]

A participant also stated:

‘The projects have drawn us closer to the government. It is a big relief to us; it would have been a difficult task to execute the projects because we lack the re-

sources. We are happy for the executed projects because of their benefits.' [Male trader, Ohuhu]

Another said:

'The projects have given us a sense of belonging. I am sure by the time the on-going projects are completed, we will be a happy people and most of our problems will cease to be. So far, I can say we are feeling the impacts. Yes, we can only feel the full impact when the on-going projects are completed.' [Male farmer, Ohanku]

Yet another revealed:

'Government rural development projects are not the same in every community. The projects differ from one community to the other. However, I thank them for their projects in our community because we are deriving some benefits from them. Their projects (electricity and road) have made life more meaningful.' [Housewife, Oloko]

We found that some of the government rural development projects have helped to improve the quality of lives of the community members in different ways. Some of the community members confessed that the projects have changed their lives. One FGD participant had this to say:

'The government projects in our community have provided employment to our unemployed youth. Today, many of them are into the transport business. The government transport scheme project provided cars and buses to youth in our community. The scheme provides that they remit a certain amount of money for a stated period of time after which they become the owners of the vehicles. This development has gone a long way in reducing crime.' [Female trader, Osusu]

Another revealed:

'Yes, their projects have greatly improved education and our children now study in a better environment. Parents are no longer burdened with the provision of desks in some of our primary and secondary schools. In the past, it was only Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that were involved in the execution of rural development projects but now the government is a force to reckon with.' [Female civil servant, Okagwe]

Data from IDI sessions further corroborated with that of the FGDs. One community leader revealed:

'I am aware that the government projects have improved the quality of lives of our people through the provision of health services, improved road network, enhanced trade and crime reduction. Today, we can easily trade with our neighbors. In the past our people lost their lives and goods as a result of boat mishap in an attempt to cross the Imo River. 'Taa anyi nwere ike iwubi mmiri Imo' (today

we can cross the Imo River) through the bridge constructed by the government.’
[Community leader, Ohuhu]

Data generated for the study also revealed that some of the participants have grudges over the government-driven rural development projects. They maintained that some of the projects were of low quality and have not addressed their felt needs. One participant was of the opinion that:

‘The government is merely duplicating what we already have. Our school was built through self-help efforts and now they have embarked upon the construction of another school at the expense of water which is our most felt need’
[Housewife, Oloko].

Another said:

‘The government just wants to make their presence felt in the community. They do not have the interest of the community at heart. They should have consulted the community members to know their needs before commencing on a particular project’ [Male trader, Ohuhu].

And yet another revealed that:

‘Some of the projects stopped functioning after they were commissioned. Their roads projects in our community did not last beyond the first rainy season, the year it was commissioned’ [Female civil servant, Okagwe].

4.4. Capacity of community members to sustain government-driven rural development projects

Data generated from the participants suggests that people lack the capacity to sustain the government-driven rural development projects. The community members disassociate themselves from the projects because they were not involved in their execution. They classified it as ‘their’ projects instead of ‘our’ projects. We also found no evidence that the projects were effectively monitored from inception to completion. A community leader affirmed:

‘The contractor handling the 20 kilometer Arua road project in our community informed us that their contract with the government will only cover 4 kilometers. When part of a project is executed and the rest is abandoned due to lack of funds, the aim of the project will be defeated. Our prayer is that more funds should be released to ensure that the road project is completed.’ [Community leader, Ozuitem]

Another community leader was of the opinion that:

‘The problem is that we are not part of their project. They believe that it is their duty to provide for the local people and we look up to them to complete what they have started and provide the necessary maintenance’ [Community leader, Oloko]

Data from the FGD corroborated with that of the IDI. A participant responded:

'Their overhead water tanks in this community are deceptive. None of them is functioning. Since they have failed to address our most felt-need, which is water, we have resorted to our old tradition of sourcing water from the river.' [Male trader, Ohuhu]

Another said:

'The government projects do not address the felt needs of our community. They are merely duplicating the projects embarked upon by the Community Based Organizations (CBOs). To ensure effective maintenance of their projects, they should involve us in the projects' identification and execution.' [Male farmer, Ohanku]

And yet another:

'Their classroom blocks in my community were hastily executed. The contractor used sub-standard materials in furnishing the classroom. Today, all the furniture is out of use. Our children have reversed to carrying desks to school.' [Cabinet member, Ozuitem]

5. Discussion of findings

The study explored membership participation and sustainability of government-driven rural development projects in Abia State, Nigeria. The qualitative method was employed in generating data for the study. Community leaders and other members of the community under study were interviewed and engaged in focus group discussions (FGDs). Findings from the study have particular reference to the knowledge of the government-driven rural development projects, community members' participation in project execution, impacts of government-driven rural development projects and the capacity of community members to sustain the government-driven rural development projects.

The study showed that the respondents are aware of the government-driven rural development projects in the communities and they include roads, schools, electricity, hospitals, recreation centers and skill acquisition projects, among others. This is in line with the findings of Dafione (2007) who enumerated the NDDC community development projects to include road, health, water, electricity and education among others. The majority of the respondents were also of the opinion that the government has completed two or more projects in the communities under study. This implies that in virtually all the communities, there exist one or more completed projects by the government agencies. It was also revealed that there were on-going projects by the government agencies in some of the communities. However, the number of on-going projects varies from one community to the other.

Findings also showed that decisions on projects to be embarked upon are mostly taken by the management of the agencies and the federal government. Similarly, the

respondents affirmed that the involvement of the community members in the decision-making process is low. This implies that the community members are excluded from making decisions affecting the projects. It is pertinent to note that the non-involvement of the local people in decision-making processes poses a great danger in project sustainability.

Sustainable development is all about participatory development, human development and environmental protection. The measures to empower community members should include involving them in the project planning, design and execution so that they have a stake in the success of the project. This will ensure membership participation. In addition, if community members are involved, then the projects so identified and planned will use techniques and principles suited to such community (Eboh, 1995). Locality participation contributes with local knowledge to development activities and increases the chances of development objectives and outputs that are relevant to local needs (Oladipo, 2001). This raises the issue of participation, a situation that calls for urgent attention for rural development projects to become sustainable. UN-Habitat (2009) has noted that in developing countries, even though attempts are made to increase participation of community members in community development projects, it is still frequently low.

The study showed the impacts of government-driven rural development projects on the quality of lives of the community members. It was observed that the rural development projects have impacted meaningfully on the quality of lives of the community members. The people saw the projects as a big relief and free gifts from the government. They enumerated the projects that have impacted on their quality of lives to include roads, electricity, education, water and health, among others. The findings corroborate with the views of Ulluwishewa (1993), Bridger and Luloff (1999), Don and Kutzmark (2006), who maintained that sustainable development brings about lasting improvement in the quality of life of the community members. It enhances a sense of place, reduces crime, mitigates natural hazards, conserves energy and resources, preserves culture and heritage, improves traffic circulation and reduces waste. Sustainable development requires minimizing for future generations. It can attract more viable economic development as competition among communities for high quality business becomes more intense and it can help to relate and integrate the many components of a community to achieve a synergistic whole (Lijing, Yonghon and Yanli, 2011).

The capacity of the community members to sustain rural development projects was also investigated. The study showed that respondents believe that they cannot sustain the projects. This could be as a result of the non-involvement of the community members in the execution of the projects. Moreover, it could be as a result of the fact that they are not well informed about the projects.

The findings of the study have theoretical relevance. The systems theory upholds that every whole is made up of parts, elements or components, and for the whole to function as a system, the components must interact. This study revealed that the

effective execution of rural development projects is a combination of components that function as a whole. Sustainability in community development requires a certain degree of order and stability. Systems theory creates room for autonomy and this development provides for greater involvement and participation in rural development activities. It also provides a framework for gaining and appreciating the contributions of the parts, elements, units or components in the community system. The study findings revealed that for the sustainability of government-driven rural development projects to be attained, all the components that make up the community system must collaborate and work together. Effective participation of the community members in the spheres of projects execution could enhance the sustainability of government-driven rural development projects.

5.1. Effects of lack of membership participation on projects

The DFRRI, NDDC and NEEDS executed various developmental projects all over the country. The projects included: rural electrification, boreholes, roads, skill acquisition centers and shelter, among others. However, some of the projects produced negative consequences. According to a presidential inspection team to some of the projects embarked upon by DFRRI reported back that many road projects executed were overgrown with grasses. Moreover, the executed boreholes were untidy even when they worked. The responses of the beneficiary communities on the unholy situation of things revealed that they have not been involved in the process and therefore could not organize for their maintenance. In the same vein, some of the NDDC projects that consumed billions of naira are overgrown with weeds and in some cases not functional. The most critical of these projects, such as pipe-borne water, were reported by Nworisara (2011) to have stopped working as soon as they were commissioned or were abandoned half way.

In most rural communities the projects embarked upon by the governmental agencies never reflected the felt needs of the people and this has implications in project sustainability. Ohiani and Oni (1987) in their survey observed that a community center which is built exactly on the European pattern is likely not to be patronized in an African village, where the community is already closely knit. Rather a village center to be used for communal purposes such as funeral ceremonies, dances and social gatherings will be acceptable to the village.

A survey by Okafor (2003) of 450 Nigerians randomly selected to represent all strata of the society revealed that the failure of rural development programs was mainly attributed to:

- weak political base and their personalization;
- proliferation of projects with little, if any, effort to harmonize or co-ordinate their activities;
- lack of sustainability arising from abandonment of programs/projects as soon as their initiator leaves office;
- a top-down approach to project formulation;

- little or no involvement of the beneficiary communities and other parties concerned in the development project; and
- inadequate funding of projects.

5.2. Implications of the study to other developing countries

The study findings are likely to have greater implications for development projects in other developing countries in Africa and elsewhere. Most rural communities in the developing countries are yet to be fully aware of the government and their roles in rural development probably because the concentration of the projects is in urban communities at the expense of rural communities. The few government-driven rural development projects had little or no inputs from the rural dwellers at the various levels of execution and such projects never reflected their felt needs. Ayida (1987) and Ijere (1992) observed that one of the reasons why some of the government-driven rural development projects failed to yield the deserved result is the use of the directive approach and the top-down approach to rural development in which a group of government professionals, experts or administrators come together to deliberate on the community needs and decide on projects to be embarked upon without the consent and involvement of the community members. This was evident in many past rural development projects and it greatly reduced the participation of community members in project execution and, also, the sustainability of such projects.

Rural development is a group process. It involves individuals and group members of the society. To enhance the effective functioning of the group towards the attainment of rural development goals and objectives, there is need for group empowerment. Empowerment enables individuals to gain social, political, economic and psychological control through (a) access to information, knowledge and skills; (b) decision-making; and (c) individual self-efficacy, community participation and perceived control (Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988). Empowerment is the key to project sustainability.

Rural development projects in most developing countries are not sustainable due to the fact that the rural dwellers are not empowered. The excesses of some government personnel and community development practitioners through the use of the directive approach to rural development and the top-bottom approach prevented the members of the communities from taking decisions on how to ameliorate their problems. Instead of allowing the people to decide, the government or the external agency often acted as the ultimate judge for the people, thus, relegating to the background the traditional structures (Oduaran, 1994). The people were denied the opportunity of active involvement in decision-making processes on issues that affect them. Involving the people in decision-making processes makes them look inward and rely on their own efforts in the process of development and see outside assistance as supplementary and not as a replacement of popular initiative or local efforts. However, denial from decision-making processes exposes the rural community to external resources that may lead to loss of independence.

6. Conclusion

The study findings indicated that participation is crucial in sustainable rural development. The effective participation condition for the decision-making process at the local level is one of the ways to promote the success of sustainability.

Rural development advocates for participatory approaches in sustainability, since protection of natural and local values, as well as executed projects, cannot be managed solely by the government. The involvement of the local people in project execution gives them a sense of ownership of the projects and enhances capacity, learning and interaction of the community members. Participation is all about self-help for when there is active participation of the people in their own affairs, they are helping themselves. Citizen participation creates room for capacity building and empowerment which are the best means to achieve sustainable rural development.

The involvement of government agencies in rural development stands out as an important effort in our present day democracy and has contributed to the transformation of urban and rural communities. Although the aim of the government has been to help in the development of rural communities by executing projects, the study revealed that the projects have created limited effects on community members. The projects are not fully recognized and appropriated by community members because of lack of information and non-involvement of the people. Sustainable development is anchored on the establishment of community involvement.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Owing to the fact that some government-driven rural development projects are abandoned after they are commissioned, it is recommended that effective monitoring of such projects from inception to completion should be carried out. This development will go a long way in reducing the problems of projects abandonment and delivery of inferior projects to the rural dwellers that constitute the bulk of the population.
- ii. Rural development projects executed by the governmental agencies in most communities are not sustainable. The reason is that most of the projects failed to address the felt-needs of the people. It is therefore recommended that the rural dwellers who are the beneficiaries of such projects should be involved in decision-making processes on issues that affect them. The developmental agencies should seek for the felt-needs of the communities and embark on projects that address them. This development will go a long way in ensuring the maintenance and protection of the executed projects.
- iii. Benefitting communities should be made to participate actively in projects that affect them. Notwithstanding the number and type of projects executed by the government, the members should share actively in the project execution. This implies that rather than imposing development projects on the community, its members should be allowed to participate in all spheres of the projects. Locality

participation enhances the community members' level of corporation and their commitment to the sustainability of the executed projects. As the members participate, their individual personalities become transformed.

- iv. Furthermore, efforts should be made to incorporate the various components or subgroups of the community into the projects. The components or subgroups should interact and work as a system for the goal of rural development to be attained. Services of experts such as social workers, agriculturists and health workers, among others, should also be sought. Awareness of the roles of social workers in project execution and overall rural development should be created.

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