

Engaging MOU and People's Participation in Project Implementation: Imperative for Sustainable Community Development in Nigeria.

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Abstract

People's participation in project implementation in the community is generally accepted as a means of mobilizing human and material resources – all directed to increasing productivity and thus improving the living standards of the people. The practicability of this strategy will be a wild dream if it cannot be institutionalized. Hence, a need for some devices such as: engaging Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the implementation committees to help foster people's participation in project execution. This paper focuses on engaging MOU and people's participation in project implementation: imperative for sustainable community development in Nigeria. Being a theoretical research, secondary materials were employed and the result shows that it is the involvement of the intended beneficiaries that can help in the sustainability of projects in the community. It was therefore concluded that, authentic engagements of MOU and people's participation are indispensable in order to make the intended beneficiaries self-reliant in the meeting of their basic needs and the making of the process of their project development self sustainable.

Keywords - Community development, MOU, People's participation, Project, Sustainable.

1. Introduction

The prevailing social, economic and political structures and relations in most of the developing countries are hardly favourable to the participation of the poor majority in the definition and implementation of community project development policies. This implies that community development planning and implementation of projects and programmes is the exclusive preserve and prerogative of governments and corporate organizations. Both the governments and corporate organizations similarly are involved in one way or the other in community development projects and programmes and they seem to assume the ability to guess correctly the needs and preferences of the community. The problem is that no sooner these projects are completed and commissioned by their donors they become non functional, this is because the institutions do not foster people's participation in project implementation as purported.

The top-down approaches to community projects development have not borne any successful fruit, rather it has degenerated into crisis and characterized by lack of commitment on the part of the communities to sustain maintenance on the project as at when due. This was clearly articulated by Machooka (1984) when he noted that "*Such strategies isolate rural population from productive participation in the development of their areas and may be the major reasons for the apparent socio-economic stagnation among the rural communities*". As a corollary, more recently the South African State, through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RNP) also encourages

People's participation in decision making, implementation, monitoring and distribution of benefits of rural development projects. It is clear, therefore, that this strategy is a means of placing human resources high in the (rural) development process. Abasiokong (1982) reckons that this strategy signifies that the community is placed as a high priority in the development programmes. Thus, the concept of people's participation in project implementation in the community is generally accepted as a means of mobilizing human and material resources – all directed to increasing productivity and thus improving the living standards of the people.

However, the practicability of this strategy will be a wild dream if it cannot be institutionalized. Hence, a need for some devices such as engaging in Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the implementation committees to help foster people's participation in project execution. It is the involvement of the intended beneficiaries that can help in the sustainability of projects in the community (Umesi, 2005). This kind of development which is people's centered approach is necessary in the present day Nigeria as it seems to enhance economies of scale. The people of the community will identify with the projects they have initiated and may even want their completion with vested interest. It is the aim of the government to improve the quality of people's life in the community. But the governments and corporate organizations similarly involved in community development without knowing the needs and preferences of the community, the aim of such project(s) is often not realized (Gozie, 2007). They just have to involve the people of the community right from the onset in decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the benefits of the projects. Authentic engagements of MOU and people's participation are indispensable in order to make the intended beneficiaries self-reliant in the meeting of their basic needs and the making of the process of their project development self sustainable (Ohwahwa, 2009).

2. Engaging MOU in Project Implementation in the Community

The concept of having a memorandum of understanding (MOU) as an integral part of the execution of projects for stake holding communities has been lauded as a welcome development by those involved in nation building at various levels and as a step in the right direction. To take the development paradigm through the MOU framework to a higher level, there is the need for a monitoring mechanism to ensure the realization of the objectives of MOU. Hence, the establishment of MOU and implementation committee is a *sine qua non* for sustainable project development in various communities in Nigeria. Thus, the implementation committee is to be established in order to serve as a backbone of sorts for MOU. The committee is to be made up of representatives of the people in the community and the officials of governments or corporate organization as the case may be. This committee shall be charged with the responsibility to:

- i. Collate and verify information on nominated projects and other sustainable development programmes and submit same to the government or corporate organization for implementation of projects in line with the agreement.
- ii. Conduct project site, visits to appraise the status of the projects in the communities and report findings to the parties once every six months.
- iii. Monitoring the compliance of all parties to the MOU agreement and issue notices of non compliance to the affected party when applicable subject to the relevance clauses of the agreement.
- iv. Review the performance of the MOU agreement and
- v. Monitor issues concerning the environment including cases of pollution.

3. People's Participation in Projects Implementation

People's participation in the implementation of community development projects is an important element and a sure way to the speedy development of the rural areas in Nigeria, and it is well attested to in research literatures (Okafor, 1984; Moughalu, 1986; Udoye, 1992; Asnarukhadi & Fariborz, 2009; Ekong, 2010; Udensi, 2012; Udoh, 2012). Participation therefore entails getting members of rural communities to participate actively and responsibly in analyzing their problems, identifying solutions based on their knowledge and available natural resources, taking decisions on accomplishing their development.

It was established from a study carried out by Akpomuvie (2010) that projects identified, planned, executed and managed by the community themselves outlive those imposed by a benefactor with little or no community participation". Community participation is a concept which describes the involvement of the people at the local level in making choices for the development of their communities. It is based on self-confidence and the possession of the capabilities to plan and take actions to solve their own problems with little or no assistance from the outside (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1997).

Success indicator for the realization of development projects is high degree of citizen involvement which only can be assured when the initiative of the people is sufficiently stimulated to arouse their enthusiasm and wholehearted involvement (Anyanwu, 1992). The foregoing view is corroborated by the position of (Ogolo, 1995) that people's participation is an act through which the beneficiaries of a development effort share in the identification of the development priorities, planning, implementation consumption and evolution of the development programs. The foregoing crystallizes the significance of memorandum of understanding in achieving sustainable community development projects in Nigeria.

Arora, (1997) opines that "the doctrine of people's participation reflects the institutionalization of consent as the quintessence of a democratic system" in the context of implementation of projects in the community, this reflection would entail the involvement of the intended participants – cum – beneficiaries of rural development projects. Also most importantly, this involvement has to be voluntary and spontaneous or even induced. Hence people's participation is also regarded as a 'right'. People have the right to participate in decision-making which directly affects their living conditions is a form of grassroots democracy. Bamberger (1991) explains that community participation refers to a process whereby beneficiaries influence all aspects of development projects rather than passively receiving benefits. Sharma (1997) argues that "participation is not regarded as having been committed to any social goals but is regarded as a technique for setting goals choosing priorities and deciding what resources to commit to goal attainment". The rationale for this is that when those directly concerned are effectively involved in planning and implementation the possibility of a remarkable success is assured.

This agrees with Piccioto (1992) and Madlavu & Davis (1993) views that to participate is to partake to share, to own and that people must be allowed to be responsible for their own development, they should determine their needs and frame their own development strategies and that they should own the process. Therefore, the creation of an institutional framework where all social groups can take part with each other as equal partners and with each other as equal partners and can set the frame within which planning can happen. This postulates, therefore, that the people can only safeguard against this manipulation if they are organized this necessitated redefinition of people's participation. Hence, Andrew, (2010) emphasizes a need for a participatory model of development in which local people are not just involved in the identification formulation, implementation and evaluation of projects, but where their knowledge and skills are the building blocks for development initiatives. Thus, participation is viewed as an active process sin which the participants take initiative and actions that are stimulated by their own thinking and deliberation and over which they can exert effective control.

In the process of community development members of community as actors are active. Participation is a process by which people are enabled to become actively and genuinely involved in defining the issues of concern to them, in making decisions about factors that affect their lives, in formulating and implementing policies, in planning, developing and delivering services and in taking action to achieve change Breuer (1999). Then, this is likely to instill in the beneficiaries a sense of self-reliance. Finally, People's Participation is the people's initiative to assert themselves as subjects of history when we speak of people we are referring to a particular group in society, namely the poor, the oppressed, the marginal group, etc.

4. Conclusion / Recommendations

It has been stressed that the idea of corporate organizations and even governments imposing programmes and projects on communities without the active participation of the people who are the direct beneficiary of such projects are no longer fashionable. It is considered essential for the representatives of the people to be actively involved in the whole gamut of the developmental process of their communities. It has been pointed out that, the views and perspectives of the people must be sought and integrated into the blueprints of projects and programmes that are meant for their communities. In addition, engaging the tool of MOU will further strengthen the bond

between the donor agencies and the beneficiaries of the project. The whole idea behind the adoption of this system is basically to instill the concept of ownership of these projects and programmes in the psyche of the people.

The paper has proved that the establishment of MOU and implementation committee is a *sine qua non* for sustainable project development and maintenance at every community in Nigeria.

Based on the foregoing, it is therefore recommended that:

- i. Proper awareness on the issues of MOU and the involvement of the representatives of the people in project initiation and execution should be encouraged through workshops, seminars etc.
- ii. MOU framework should be recognized as a potent device that would cement cordial relationship between the beneficial community and donor agencies in achieving sustainable development.
- iii. Establishment of committees from the beneficial communities is very important for the creation of forums for meaningful participation. This is strongly recommended in order to dismantle monopoly and dominance on projects by donor agencies.

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