Full Length Research Paper

The role of local leaders in community development programmes in Kokona local government area of Nasarawa state: Implication for rural development

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The study ascertained the role of local leaders in community development programmes in Kokona LGA and derived implications for local leadership as an institution for rural development. A total of 104 respondents comprising leaders and non-leaders and selected through stratified random sampling technique participated in the study. Percentage and mean scores were utilized in realizing the objectives. Results showed that the most important roles played by local leaders in community development were; decision-making (_= 3.82); liaison between governmental and non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance (_= 3.80); monitoring and evaluation of projects (_= 3.78); and fund raising for projects (_= 3.76). Further results showed that the most important (40%) source of information for community development efforts were through the local leaders themselves. Gender was a major issue in community development as result revealed that women were not given equal opportunity for participation in community initiatives like their male counterparts. Incompatibility of government policies with community programmes (_= 3.84), insufficient sources of funds (_= 3.83), poor implementation of programmes (_= 3.80), and gender bias (_= 3.77) constituted the major constraints to effective leadership in community development programmes in the area. It was concluded that for sustained success to be achieved in community development efforts, there is an urgent need for extension policy that will formally accommodate the local leaders in all community development initiatives of both governmental and nongovernmental agencies.

Keywords: Local leaders, role, community development, programmes.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that self-sustained rural community development is vital to the economic and social progress of any developing nation like Nigeria. Unless the ways and means of massively accelerating development in the rural areas where over 80% of Nigeria's population reside (Guardian Newspapers, 2008) our national goal of self sufficiency and control over resources may continue to elude us. Interestingly, the resources already exist, but what is missing is the mastery of the practical wisdom and technology to mobilize them for our overall benefit (leadership). The main argument in favour of community-based development is that communities are deemed to have a better knowledge of the prevailing local conditions (such

as who is poor and deserves to be helped, or the characteristics of the local micro-environment), and a better ability to enforce rules, monitor behaviour, and verify actions related to interventions (Emeka 2012).

The true success of a comprehensive economic and social development programmes in Nigeria is primarily dependent upon the extent it contributes to the well-being of those living in rural areas. This is because majority of Nigeria's population that reside in rural areas, depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. The development that is envisaged is not merely a handout of benefits to people in need, but a process of empowerment where rural communities can acquire mastery over their own destiny through the realization that they, individually and

collectively can do something to improve their circumstances. This is a refocusing strategy from waiting on government, oil companies or other organizations/donors to solving their own problems themselves. Community development according to Ajayi (1995) and Hanachor (2012) is a social process by which human beings can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local conditions and the changing world.

Sustainable community development cannot take place through force or order, but is most likely to happen when all actors participate and share their ideas, visions and responsibilities equally and democratically in steering and implementing their community or village development projects (Ajayi, et al, 2006). According to Emeka (2012), one approach in creating sustainable rural development is through giving the main actors (villagers living in the community) an equal opportunity to think and plan their own future. This underpins the need for effective leadership at the local community levels in order to harness the efforts of the rural people towards their own development.

Usually, community development programmes aim at creating awareness of rural possibilities; providing information on resources, inputs and infrastructure; deploying technical assistance; skills acquisition and development; increasing literacy levels; improving productivity and productive systems; adapting appropriate technology in agriculture; sensitizing potential volunteers and donors among other things. Ideally, most community development programmes in developing nations focus on peoples' felt needs and basic amenities such as the provision of good roads, electricity, health clinics, markets, school buildings, and farm settlements among others.

These goals can only be achieved through the combined and collective efforts of all those who share the conviction that rural community development must be accorded a high priority in our drive for poverty alleviation and national self-sufficiency. To help bring a rural community to action, it is necessary for individuals and groups to provide good leadership. When good leadership is provided, the people participate voluntarily in the accomplishment of stated objectives. The approach to rural community development is always through local leaders who not only act as pioneers of projects but also help in influencing and motivating their people to action. For any rural community development to be successful, influential local leaders must be involved else they might undermine the progress of such programmes.

Therefore, any agency or organization coming up with a development programme for the community must initially "clear" with these influential local leaders, a process otherwise referred to as legitimization. It is

saddening to recall that rural community development was neglected by successive governments since colonial rule in Nigeria. For instance, according to Adebisi(2009) while the colonial government concentrated their development projects such as roads, schools, hospitals, and pipe-borne water around the major cities and built network of roads to areas where they exploited our natural resources, the rural areas were completely left out.

The post-independence governments are not equally left out in the practice of rural neglect as only communities whose sons and daughters were in government benefited from development projects otherwise referred to as "national cake". Even where good development programmes were designed for rural areas, they most of the time failed because there were no scientific and empirical studies of the target rural communities which should guide their implementation. Since the 1980's, Nigeria and many African countries have experienced a rising wave of revolts and restiveness by some rural commun ities. Governments have not been able to tackle these crises because, there were no reliable baseline studies on the problems of such rural people (Ovwigho, et al, 2004).

Because lack of Government sensibility to the plight of rural people, it therefore falls on the ruralites to free themselves from the shackles of underdevelopment with or without government supports. The questions now are what roles do local leaders play in community development efforts in the study area? What are the sources of information for community development? What are the gender issues implicated in community development in the area? And what are the constraints to effective leadership in community development programmes in the area. These questions form the focus of our research study.

Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose of the study was to ascertain the role of local leaders in community development programmes in Kokona Local Government Area (LGA) of Nasarawa State. Specifically, the study aimed to:
1. ascertain the various roles played by local leaders in community development programmes in the study area;
2. identify the sources of information on community development;
3. describe the gender issues in local leadership as it relates to community development;
4. identify the constraint factors that hinder local leaders from achieving results in community development in the area; and
5. draw implications for rural development.

Table 1. Distribution of communities in Kokona Local Government Area

Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6
A/ Takwa	Gurku	Amba	Kokona	M/Maisauri	Ninkoro
Tatara Mada	Arusu	Kandere	Angwa Doka	Sabon Gida	Moroa
A/Mainasara	Mandara	Kiyabisi	Pam Barau	A/Mayo	Ajuye
K/Shinkafa	Umgbolo	Sabo Ruwa	Bukoko	Kurame	Ambasi

Source: Field data 2012

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Kokona LGA of Nasarawa State Nigeria is made up of 6 districts and about 200 communities. These communities were stratified into six zones based on geographical location (Table 1). The population comprised all the leaders and non-leaders in the selected areas without restriction to any other socio-economic characteristic. A stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the two categories of respondents in each community.

In order to select the actual leaders and non-leaders in the communities, a pretest was conducted. In the pretest, the village heads in each community were asked to identify 30 leaders in their respective communities. Subsequently, the identified leaders were equally asked to identify 20 actual leaders in their respective communities. From the later list which was ranked, 10 leaders were finally selected from each community giving a total of 60 leaders from the six zones. On the other hand, the non-leaders comprised any other member of the communities who were not selected in the first or second instance. Ten non-leaders were selected from a list of 80 from the respective communities, which equally gave a total of 60 non-leaders from the six zones.

However, valid responses that are suitable for analysis were obtained from only 48 leaders and 56 non-leaders giving a grand total of 104 respondents for the study. A set well-structured and validated interview schedule with items based on the objectives of the study was used for primary data collection. The instrument was pretested for reliability using the split-halve correlation technique and validated by experts in the rural development profession (the academia, and rural development experts). The pre-test shows a reliability coefficient of 0.82 and was significant at 0.00 probability level. According to Bryman (2004), a reliability coefficient of 0.8 and above implies a satisfactory and an acceptable level of internal reliability. Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in each zone to make the study more interactive and participatory oriented. Items discussed were centred on the specific objectives of the study. Trained extension agents assisted in the collection of data under the supervision of the researchers. (Table 1)

In order to ascertain the various roles played by local leaders in community development programmes, statements bordering on roles of local leaders in community development obtained from extensive literature searches and interviews with experts were structured and used. A four point likert type scale with values of very important = 4; Important = 3; less important = 2; and not important = 1, was used to identify the most important roles played by local leaders in rural community development in the area. A cut-off mark of 2.5 was used to indicate the level of importance of each statement. Statements with values of ≥2.5 indicated an important role as perceived by the respondents while statements with values <2.5 indicated an unimportant statement as perceived by the respondents.

In order to identify the sources of information for community development in the area, a list of possible sources of information for community action and development also obtained from literature and interviews with experts was prepared and the respondents were allowed to indicate the most reliable sources of information. To describe the gender issues to local leadership as it relates to community development, relevant questions bordering on gender issues and obtained from literature and case studies were structured and used in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This discussion was organized in each of the five zones that were chosen for the study.

In identifying the constraints that hinder local leaders from achieving results in community development in the area, a four point Likert type scale was used to determine the extent to which some list of issues may pose as a constraint or possible solution to the constraints. These constraint issues were obtained from practical experiences, case studies and related literature on local leadership and community development issues worldwide. The response options and values assigned were; not at all = l; to some extent = 2; to a great extent = 3; and to a very great extent = 4. Statements with values of ≥2.5 indicated a major constraint factor to effective leadership in rural community development and vice

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their perceived roles of local leaders in community development (n= 104)

S/N	Perceived roles	▪	SD	Remarks
1	Making decisions on different issues affecting the community that require integrated approach	3.82	1.12	Important
2	Acting as liaison between governmental and non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance	3.80	1.00	Important
3	Monitoring and evaluation of projects for proper implementation	3.78	0.95	Important
4	Raising funds through levies, donations, launchings, etc to finance community development projects in the area	3.76	1.11	Important
5	Developing a plan of work for the community projects	3.69	1.21	Important
6	Legitimization of development projects in the community	3.67	0.95	Important
7	Diffusing and educating rural people on government/non government intensions for the community	3.65	0.88	Important
8	Ensuring that all assistance from government/nongovernment agencies reach the targeted people in the community	3.65	1.20	Important
9	Coordinating all rural development projects in the community to ensure that results are achieved	3.63	1.30	Important
10	Ensuring that all factors such as land tenure, communication, etc, that may impede developmental processes are removed	3.60	0.93	Important
11	Ensuring cordial relationship among ruralites for effective and efficient participation in community development programmes	3.57	1.14	Important
12	Maintenance of peace and harmony between communities that bound own community	3.52	0.89	Important
13	Determining feasible community development programmes based on the needs, priorities and available resources	3.51	1.23	Important
14	Providing information to rural people on where and how to obtain farm inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, credits seeds, etc	3.40	1.10	Important
15	Providing informal technical advice to ruralites on how to utilize farm inputs	3.33	1.21	Important
16	Enforcing government laws such as tax payments through dialogue and persuasion	3.01	1.11	Important
17	Awaking the political consciousness in the community	2.95	0.98	Important
18	Developing proposals for funding by the community, governmental or non-governmental bodies	2.64	0.81	Important
19	Ostracizing erring community members	2.42	1.32	Unimportant
20	Settling of household disputes	2.39	1.24	Unimportant
21	Arresting hoodlums in the community	2.36	0.85	Unimportant
22	Paying levies for indigent members of the community	2.31	1.22	Unimportant
23	Arranging for marriage partners for spouses in the community	1.8	1.43	Unimportant

Source: Field data 2006; Cut-off point = 2.5

versa. Percentage scores mean scores, and standard deviations were utilized in realizing the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Roles of local leaders in community development

Results in Table 2 show that the most important roles played by local leaders in community development in the area constituted about 78% of the perceived roles and they include; making decisions on different issues affecting the community that require integrated approach ($\_$= 3.82); acting as liaison between governmental and nongovernmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance ($\_$= 3.80); monitoring and evaluation of projects for proper implementation ($\_$= 3.78); and raising funds through levies, donations, launchings, etc to finance community

TABLE 3. Distribution of Respondents according to Sources of Information forCommunity Development (n= 104)

S/N	Sources of Information	Percentages
1	Local leaders	40.00
2	Friends and neighbours	22.00
3	Television and radio (Audiovisuals)	18.00
4	Newspapers/magazines(prints)	11.00
5	NGOs	6.00
6	Workshop/seminars	3.00

Source: Field data 2012

development projects in the area (_= 3.76). Other important roles include statements 5-18 (Table 2). On the other hand, the respondents viewed statements 19-23 as unimportant roles played by local leaders in community development in the area. This constitutes about 22% of the overall perceived roles.

In most rural communities, local leaders are normally democratically elected to represent the different sects in the community. This provides the opportunity for the elected leaders to make genuine decisions that will favour majority of the people. Decision-making is a difficult task especially as it concerns rural communities. This is because the integrity of the decision-makers is always at stake hence they strive to live up to expectations in taking good decisions for their people. In the FGD conducted, the respondents noted that they hold the decisions of their leaders at high esteem and endeavour to comply with the directives they give. Extension therefore should make good use of this opportunity by harnessing the efforts of the local leaders into their programmes to ensure sustainability and success. This they can achieve by involving local leaders in programme development and implementation (Chukwuone, et al, 2006). Because local leaders are always vocal, intelligent, cosmopolitan, knowledgeable, and sometimes educated, their role in liaising between agencies of development and their communities stand out clearly.

The respondents also observed that in seeking for external financial or technical aids, they have always used their *best brains* in the community to obtain that. This is because such people are well connected to the corridors of power or to influential people/organizations. They equally know the best approaches in bringing them into the community for assistance. Such leaders can as well promote extension work especially where they have been involved from the outset. The success of any development project depends on whether it has good machinery for monitoring and evaluating it. Monitoring and evaluation is necessary in order to make prompt

adjustments during the project life and to ensure compliance to targeted objectives. Respondents noted that the failure to properly monitor and evaluate projects in the past has led to the collapse of many development projects initiated in their community.

One of the major roles played by local leaders in the study area was the issue of raising funds for community developments. When this is done internally, it was through launchings, donations, levies and fines, as against donor funding that come from outside the community.

The respondents noted that raising funds for projects in the rural community is a very sensitive task because most times, the funds are not properly used due to corruption and lack of transparency. This has often generated crisis in most communities where some interest groups that are not satisfied with the way previous projects were executed may boycott from participating in future launchings or paying levies. This may result in drive actions that may deteriorate into open chaos. Extension should be careful not to involve itself with community finances and concentrate on their educational responsibilities (Akwa, 2009).

Sources of information on community development

Results in Table 3 show that local leaders were the major (40.00%) source of information for community development programmes in the area while workshops/seminars provide the least information. Local leaders are indispensable set in any community. Where such leaders are dedicated, honest, and hardworking, the community tends to develop rapidly amidst living in peace. Respondents noted through the FGD conducted that most of the community development projects in the community were initiated by the local leaders who also educate the people on the consequences and impacts of such projects before they are implemented. The leaders were able to play this role because of their high level of intelligence, being

Table 4. Factors that hinder Local Leaders from Achieving Results in CommunityDevelopment (n= 104)

S/N	Constraint factors	▪	SD	Remarks
1	Incompatibility of government policies/programmes with community programmes	3.84	0.98	Major constraint
2	Insufficient sources of funds for community development projects	3.83	1.15	Major constraint
3	Poor implementation of programmes	3.80	1.09	Major constraint
4	Gender bias	3.77	0.86	Major constraint
5	High cost of labour	3.68	1.23	Major constraint
6	Lack of cooperation among stakeholders	3.65	1.05	Major constraint
7	Unequal participation of stakeholders in project initiation development and implementation	3.62	1.24	Major constraint
8	Scarcity and problems of land resources	3.60	1.21	Major constraint
9	Poor monitoring and evaluation of projects	3.57	1.27	Major constraint
10	Negative effects of traditions and culture of people	3.54	1.00	Major constraint
11	Self-centeredness of some local leaders	3.48	1.07	Major constraint
12	Political instability	3.45	1.01	Major constraint
13	Time required for community development	3.34	1.20	Major constraint
14	Illiteracy/low educational qualifications	3.27	1.23	Major constraint
15	Lack of adequate communication infrastructure	3.19	0.99	Major constraint
16	Disagreement between the local leaders and the grassroots	3.09	0.95	Major constraint
17	Women discrimination	3.02	0.90	Major constraint
18	Environmental degradation and adverse weather conditions	3.00	0.96	Major constraint
19	Lack appropriate mechanism for discipline erring local leaders	2.78	1.05	Major constraint
20	Lack of interest in community development programmes	2.48	1.11	Not a constraint
21	Religious crisis	2.37	1.12	Not a constraint
22	Large household sizes	2.24	0.89	Not a constraint
23	Interference by opposition groups in the community	2.03	1.12	Not a constraint

Source: Field data 2012; Cut-off point = 2.5

cosmopolitan, good level of education, good connections, among others..

Gender issues in local leadership as it relates to community development

Gender was a major issue in the study area as respondents observed that women were not given equal opportunity for participation in local leadership in the community like their male counterparts. Factors like cultural barriers, lack of respect for women, domestic engagements and entrenched gender stereotypes were highlighted during the focus group discussions as being responsible for their low participation in local leaderships. In a similar study by Ajayi, et al, (2006) and Akwa et al(2005), majority of women were socially, culturally and politically barred from participating in community development planning and decision-making processes. Ironically, respondents still noted that the contribution of women in community developments issues were very high and significant. One strong reason in their favour is that in most rural communities, they constitute the greater majority in terms of population. Often, their husbands leave them at their villages in search of greener pastures in the urban areas. Women's voices and concerns in the community are especially important to community development and welfare as most women are involved in meeting needs in the areas of social education, health, and environmental projects, while men continue to pay more attention to economic, agricultural and infrastructural development (Ajayi, et al 2006).

Also, some foreign development agencies target women programmes for funding and assistance for example the Gender and Diversity programmes of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), and The Commission on Advancement of Women – An American Council for Voluntary International Action. It is therefore important that all stakeholders in any community- men and women, rich and poor, young and old, and other groups be fully involved in leading and designing community development programmes. It is only when this is done that enduring and sustaining programmes can be achieved in the local communities.

Constraint factors that hinder local leaders from achieving results in community development

Results in Table 4 show that out of the 23 constraint factors considered, respondents perceived 19 factors as major constraints and four as not a constraint. The most important of the constraints include; incompatibility of government policies with community programmes (_= 3.84), insufficient sources of funds for community development projects (_= 3.83), poor implementation of programmes (_= 3.80), and gender bias (_= 3.77).

Most community development programmes in Nigeria have always enjoyed the financial and technical assistance of government in one way or the other. However, if the programme embarked upon by a community is not in line with the current government rural community development efforts; such a community programme may not enjoy any assistance as a matter of fundamental principle. It is therefore important for local leaders to ensure that their programmes fall within government priority areas for development. Also, insufficient funds have prevented many good ideas that were

development in communities (Ugboh, 2007).

Respondents noted that there were many abandoned projects in the community as a result of lack of funds to complete it. In order to accomplish tasks, leaders must learn to involve both internal and external sources of funding for their projects. Also, when programmes are poorly executed or implemented, the grassroots get discouraged in further participating in other programmes initiated by the leaders. Leaders should therefore ensure that they gain the credibility of their subjects and sponsors and further commit their energy and time in a transparent way towards achieving success in community development programmes. To check this, erring local leaders must be disciplined through appropriate mechanism.

Such a mechanism must involve the possibility of detecting embezzlements and punishing the leader in the event of a proven fraud (Platteau et al, 2003). For example by requiring the leader to repay the aid money which he has misappropriated other leaders will take correction. Gender bias, especially against women was seriously implicated among the limiting factors to local leadership in the study area. According to Ugboh, (2007), the role of the local leaders in rural and community development is influenced by their gender. The author maintained that women do not play the same level of leadership role as their male counterparts. Respondents noted that most times, women were not involved in decision-making process because they feel that women have little or nothing to offer. Many studies have shown on the contrary, that women possess the necessary skills and capacity to deliver good programmes in the community (Ajayi et al, 2006; Ugboh, 2007; Manju, 1995; Akwa, et al,2005). Therefore, both men and women

should be involved in leadership roles in community development so that they complement each other's efforts where necessary.

Implication for extension policy and practice

Agricultural extension has been defined as a series of embedded communicative interventions that are meant, among others, to develop and/or induce innovations which supposedly help to resolve (usually multi-actor) problematic situations (Leeuwis, 2006). By this, extension aims to provide answers to the numerous problems that confront farmers and rural people in their quest to sustain their livelihoods. To achieve this, policies are usually put in place by governments which stipulate the guidelines for the achievement of objectives. With reference to local leadership in community development, extension stand to gain a lot if it formally incorporates the local leaders in all its rural development efforts judging from the numerous roles that local leaders play in the community (as already enumerated above).

When local leaders are formally integrated into the programmes of extension, they complement the efforts of extension thereby reducing time wastage, stress, and costs; and increasing outputs, productivity, awareness and overall standard of living in the rural communities.

Also increasing gender balance (men, women, youth, and children) in the rural communities and extension policy will equally mobilize greater mass participation in agricultural extension programmes. However, it is saddening to note that Nigeria has no well-defined agricultural extension policy that outlines the guiding principles for service delivery. This has been a major problem in the overall success of extension programme in Nigeria. This therefore poses a big challenge for extension administrators, Agricultural Extension Society of Nigeria, agricultural policymakers, and other well meaning development agents in Nigeria and abroad to facilitate the enactment of an extension policy in Nigeria. It is only when this is done that extension will take its rightful place in the rural development initiatives of government as is seen in the developed societies.

CONCLUSION

The study ascertained the role of local leaders in community development programmes in Kokona Local Government Area (LGA) of Nasarawa State. Results showed that among the prominent roles played by the local leaders include; making decisions on different issues affecting the community that require integrated approach, acting as liaison between governmental and non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation of projects for proper implementation, and

raising funds through levies, donations, launchings, etc to finance community development projects in the area.

Further results showed that the main source of information on community development in the area was through the local leaders. Also, women were not actively involved in local leadership in the area. The respondents identified incompatibility of government policies with community programmes, insufficient sources of funds, poor implementation of programmes, and gender bias among others as the major constraints that limit local leaders from achieving results in community development in the area.Extension policy must legitimately recognize the potentials of local leaders in rural community development and partner with them in the overall efforts to provide innovative solutions to the hydra-headed nature of problems in the rural areas. There must be gender balance in leadership in order to give the often marginalized groups (women, youths, and children) opportunity to participate in community development programmes. The identified constraints need integrated approach in providing solutions by all stakeholders in rural community development including extension workers, farmers, influential people in the community, government, non-governmental organizations, charity organizations, and the international donor agencies.

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