

Original Research

The position of youths and women participation in community-based self-help projects and policy implications for community development in Nasarawa state

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ABSTRACT:

The ever-growing and dwindling resources at the disposal of African Governments, particularly Nigeria in providing or addressing the basic needs of citizens gave rise to the heightened glamour for private sector involvement in public services delivery. This is the logic behind the recognition of community efforts in promoting self-help projects and the formation of Community Development Groups and Associations (CDGs/As) as vehicle for the initiation and execution of community-based development projects. This paper reports the findings of a study carried out on the contributions of these private community-based initiatives in Nasarawa State at the micro level with focus on the mechanism of member-participation within the CDGs with particular reference to the level of youth and women involvement in community development in the state. The inquiries for the research involved two aspects of data-primary and secondary. The former involved field work, while the latter concerned and relied on review of official records. One hundred percent (100%) of membership lists was systematically drawn from a collection of alphabetically arranged row of CDGs from three designated Community Development Project Zones where each centrally occurring group was picked. A total of 125 respondents (45, 20, and 60 respectively), including group officials were found expedient for the research. One interview schedule of questionnaires and one informants' interview formed the data acquisition instruments, in addition to audio-visual and focus-group discussion. Data was analyzed and presented using simple descriptive statistical techniques. Results obtained showed dismal ratios of 19%, 29%; 10%, 0% and 28%, 22% respectively, in Youth and Women participation in the groups studied, with values varying distinctively between urban and rural communities. The findings indicate facts concerning the performance and outcome of member-participation in self-help project planning in Nasarawa State and by implication, their role in rendering their quota in collaboration with government in community development. The study recommends that policy attention at strengthening member-participation in community-based self-help projects should focus on the teeming youths and women population by improving their educational or literacy level to arouse their awareness on the need for participation.

Keywords:

Youths, Women participation, Self-help, Community development groups, Project zones.

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INTRODUCTION

Member-Participation in community self-help projects as distinct from community participation is the latest paradigm shift among several theories and practice of community development involving collaborative strategies employed at the macro and micro levels to provide solutions to community problems. It conveys along the notion that a community, construed as an organization or an interest group, has the capacity to empower and offer solutions to a community cherished community challenge(s) through a synergy of local resource pull and face – to – face or inter-personal decision making process.

This article highlights the findings of a research in which youths and women were found to exhibit low participation in community development in Nasarawa State. A recent survey on some communities in the state revealed a fascinating but ambivalent performance picture of community self-help projects.

The relevance of this study stems from the idea that Community Development Groups (CDGs) have in recent times remained a sustainable tool and vehicle for community development, in complement to government as a prime social service provider. This position was however found to vary between rural and urban communities.

For the purpose of securing data for this research, three CDGs were sampled from three designated

Community Development Project Zones (CDPZs) through a systematic random sampling procedure. The implication of the research results is the need for steady support to be given to the CDGs as a way of strengthening member-participation in community development in the state. Nasarawa state is located in the middle belt region of Nigeria, located on latitude 8.35' and longitude 8.20'. This state was created from the former Plateau state in October 1, 1996 during the administration of General Sani Abacha. It is bounded to the north by Kaduna state, on the north-west by the Federal Capital Territory, eastwards by Taraba and Plateau, with Kogi and Benue states forming the southern boundary. It is served with a network of roads which link pretty all parts of the study area and beyond. It is made up of 13 local Government areas, and there are a little over 170 registered CDG's. The study area is zoned into 3 designated "Community Development Project Zones" roughly coinciding with the 3 Senatorial Districts of the state (Table 1). Nasarawa State has a total land area of approximately 27,116.8 square kilometres. An estimate of her population figure of approximately 1.86 as at 2006, projected based on the National Growth Rate of 3.5% per annum puts her total population at approximately 3 million people, comprising all the rural and urban settlements in the 13 local Government areas. It is inhabited by over 30 heterogeneous ethnic groups.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The inquiries for the research involved two aspects of data - primary and secondary. The former involved field work, while the latter concerned and relied on the review of official records. One hundred percent (100%) of membership lists of the three selected CDGs that is 45, 20 and 60 respectively, were interviewed including officials in each case. One interview schedule of questionnaires and one set of informants' interview schedule were designed to aid in the data procurement.

Table 1. Nasarawa state by senatorial districts and constituent local government area

S. No	Senatorial Districts/ CDPZ	Number and names of Local Government Areas	
1	Western	Nasarawa, Karu, Keffi, Kokona, Toto	5
2	Northern	Akwanga, Wamba, Nas. Eggon	3
3	Southern	Lafia, Awe, Doma, Keana, Obi	5
Total	3		13

Table 2. Gender profile of participants in sample CDGs of the study area

S. No	Gender	CDGs studied					
		Mararaba-Karu eminent people's club (Group I)		Wakama development Association (Group II)		New agency for community action (Group III)	
1		Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage
2	Male	38	85	20	100	48	80
3	Female	7	15	0	0	12	20
4	Total	45	100	20	100	60	100

The structured questionnaire sought information from officials and other members of the Community Development Groups. The schedule contains routine questions on respondents' gender, age, literacy level, occupation. Other information inquired includes organisational skills and knowledge of group leaders; mode of contribution by members and level of awareness, among others. Data was analysed with the application of descriptive statistic techniques as they were found adequate in revealing the results of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Basically, three or four issues formed the focus of this discussion such as gender, educational and occupational profiles as well as trend of members' contribution toward group resources. It is argued that the gender composition of CDG members, as well as educational and occupational background can affect or influence level of members' and group contribution towards resource mobilization and control. This in effect will affect the level of project performance and sustainability. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 reflect the effects of these variables on CDG project performance in three project environments in the study area.

The demographic data of the members of CDGs showed that male gender preponderates over their female counterparts in the three groups. The gender imbalance as far as self-help development activities are concerned, is probably attributable to the fact that women in this part of Nigeria have the challenge of restriction or seclusion; a situation which is probably likely to be traced to

religious rather than ethnographic factors. The fact of life today, however, portrays that at any side economic and social opportunity, women in particular are prone to change their attitude towards participatory development in their communities, as once asserted by Theron (2005). This implies that participation can constitute a veritable means of ensuring equity among communities.

Table 3 shows data on elites, youths and women participation and contributions in the projects under study. The data revealed that youths have the lowest level of participation among the three groups studied (19%), (10%) and (28%), respectively, while the elite element (52%), (90%), (50%) are the highest. However, only in the first and the third cases women showed some level of interest (9%; 10%). The explanation for zero relevance of the women folk in the second case is not far-fetched, being not different from the fundamental reason that in hinterland locations, (second case - Wakama) as in the most traditional (rural) Nigerian communities, women have naturally been relegated to the background, and only viewed to be the weaker sex and never to do well outside the home (Guijt *et al.*, 1998; Andrea, 2001). "Women are generally excluded from the dominant world view and Wale Vocabularies"... but women today, especially the working class are known to sacrifice even their labour and expertise; and are particularly often involved in financial contribution towards educational development (Jua, 2002; Njoh, 2002). The inference from this is that women are beginning to register themselves in the current scheme of things as dictated by the new development paradigm (WID as against WAD

Table 3. Trend of contribution towards resource mobilisation by members

S. No	Occupational profile	CDGs studied								
		Mararaba-Karu eminent people's club		Wakama development association			New agency for community action and development			
		Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage	
1	How would you rate or assess the contribution of elites, youths and women to your association?	Elites:	23	52%	Elites	18	90%	Elites	30	50%
		Youths:	9	19%	Youths:	2	10%	Youths	17	28%
		Women:	13	29%	Women:	0	0%	Women	13	22%
		Total:	45	100%	Total:	20	100%	Total:	60	100%

Gender mainstreaming as cited in Andrea (2001)). Women showed special interest in providing solutions to economic difficulties by providing infrastructure and solidarity (Aregbeshla, 2009). The elites on the other hand, see their contributions rather as a source of pride, personal self aggrandisement, a means of wealth redistribution to the poor and indigent. Others participate because they want to encourage others

Table 4 showed data on the level of formal education of members of the case study groups. In each column it could be observed that majority of members are in the secondary and tertiary categories. Note the glaring variance in the ratio between Wakama development association on one hand and Mararaba-Karu people's club, and New agency for community action on the other; 85%, 68% and 90% in the sum up of secondary and tertiary segments, respectively. This could be a reflection of the general literacy situation among rural communities as compared to urban-based,

cosmopolitan communities. The situation is even more evident when the percentage with zero level of education is three times higher than that representing the rural communities. The overall participatory effect can therefore only be better imagined for the cases under examination. This is in tandem with the theses that level of education is likely to vary with the project environment. The fact also remains that the general level of education has a significant relationship with people's standard of living. Moreover, Theron (2005) once reported that level of literacy is a potent determinant of individual member participation.

Data on Table 5 represented the occupational profile of participant members of CDGs in the groups studied. Members of the community development groups studied spread across all professional groups presented in the survey. However, the proportion of the unemployed is higher in the second (Wakama) group than among the first and the third groups 20%, 15% and 5%. Deducing

Table 4. Educational background of sample CDGs in the study area

S. No	Educational Background	CDGs studied					
		Mararaba-Karu eminent people's club		Wakama development association		New agency for community action and development	
		Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage
1	Secondary	32	70%	11	60%	45	75%
2	Tertiary	7	15%	3	8%	9	15%
3	Others	5	10%	2	10%	3	5%
4	None	1	5%	5	22%	3	5%
5	Total	45	100%	20	100%	60	100%

Table 5. Occupational profile in sample CDGs in study area

S. No	Occupational profile	CDGs studied					
		Mararaba-Karu eminent people's club		Wakama development association		New agency for community action and development	
		Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage	Nos.	Percentage
1	Civil servants	11	25%	10	50%	18	30%
2	Professional	16	35%	4	20%	21	35%
3	Bus. persons	11	25%	2	10%	18	30%
4	Unemployed	7	15%	4	20%	3	5%
5	Total	45	100%	20	100%	60	100%

from the import of the data, it could be said that the first (Mararaba-Karu) and the third (New Agency for Community Action) groups have higher propensity for development; and by implication, impact on the larger community than the other. Therefore, deducing from the data sets in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 participatory trend in self-help especially as shown in the case studies, it could be claimed that member-participation in self-help activities are more active and functional among urban-like communities than in rural-like social settings; while women now generally exhibit increasing tendencies towards contributing to self-help projects. (Nkwi, 1997; Njoh, 2002). Results of this study also reveal the emerging pattern of youth and gender (women) participation and or contribution towards group activities amongst rural and urban communities as products of their level of literacy and thus exposure and indeed standard of living.

The obvious policy implication in this circumstance is in the strengthening of CDGs and associations amongst rural and urban communities particularly in the direction improving the educational or literacy level of the populace in order to enhance people's level of awareness on the need for participation.

CONCLUSION

In this article a case has been made for the strengthening of CDGs amongst rural and urban communities in Nasarawa State for the purpose of

achieving effective community development on a collaborative basis between government and the community. The current position of low youths and women participation in CDG activities constitute a challenge to community development. Particular attention should therefore be focused on the teeming youths and women population by improving their educational or literacy level to arouse their awareness on the need for participation.

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