

Community Development: Towards Creating an Enabling Environment for Learning in Rural Areas of Nigeria

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ANNOTATION: Community development is hindered in rural areas as a result of their culture, beliefs, values. This calls for enabling environment for learning. The aim of this study was to explore the possibilities of creating enabling environment for learning in rural areas. The study is of the opinion that this can be created through social development workers, teacher education, a climate of opinion, modern cooperatives, protected areas, and establishment of municipalities, among others. The study, in addition identified strategies for achieving learning, which include transformative education, transformational learning, testing etc. Other issues examined in this study include mechanism for reducing illiteracy in rural areas, the question of participation and problem of culture in rural areas.

Keywords: Community Development, Learning and Learning Environment.

Introduction

Community Development globally is considered a necessity as there is no community that does not desire social change. In Nigeria one of its importance especially in rural communities is helping to build the competencies of members of the community, which they need in order to better their condition. Thus, learning is an integral part of community development. This is based on the fact that development must largely derive from the effort of the people themselves (Amadei, 2015; Wordu, 2019). That is to say that people are the agents of their own development, and not merely subjects. In rural areas, this is to a great extent hindered by their cultures as there are certain elements of their cultures which are not compatible with the modern world, such as their superstitious beliefs.

In order to address this situation, the federal government has implemented, several community development programmes in Nigeria but all failed. For example, the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) (1972-197), the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) (1976-1981), the Green Revolution

Programme (GRP) (1981-1983) and the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) (1983-1985), better Life for Rural women (BLRW), Family Economic Advanced Programme (FEAP) and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) failed to mention just a few (Iwuchukwu & Njoku, 2015; Deedan, 2022).

President Goodluck Jonathan's Transformation Agenda (TA) and the current Government of Mohamadu Buhari's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) also failed to have positive influence for community development. It may be entirely right to say that the solution to this situation is to create an enabling environment for learning. Researches have shown that conducive environment for learning have positive impact on learning. Learning environment was found to be related to achievement in Fraser's review of 40 studies on the effects of classroom climate. Creating a positive climate was also identified as the main characteristics of quality teachers in a study carried out by OECD. They reveal that for learning to take place, certain environmental conditions are necessary. How can they be created? And what are the strategies for achieving learning? These questions prompted this study.

Problem of Culture in Rural Areas

Culture has been defined as the totality of the customs, techniques, and values that distinguish a social group, a tribe, a people or a nation (Mondin cited in Bisong & Ekenem, 2020:9). Bishop and Ekenem (2020) captures the problems in rural area as follows:

Africans conceptualize the world as that of extraordinary harming, one of synthetic unity and compatibility among all things. They see a word where everything "is dove tailing" into one another. The Africans see events as being determined by the will of spiritual beings, operations of automatic forces, and self-willed action of men and other animals will follow in orderly and comprehensive sequence.

The thrust of their argument is that Africans believe causation must be explained as the acts of supernatural forces. The manifestation of this in rural cultures involves the following characteristics:

Fatalistic – Holding the belief that events are decided in advance by a supernatural power and that humans have no control over them.

Superstitious– Believing in the supernatural and its influence to bring good or bad luck.

Ambivalent – Having mixed feeling about something or someone.

Conservative - Holding opposite view to accepting change; holding traditional values strongly.

Myopic – Short sighted.

Myth and Legend - They regard myth and legend. These characteristics influence their world view and minimizes change.

These affect them in so many negative ways, and hinder them from the pursuit of goals that will bring desirable changes in their lives and communities.

Clarification of the Concept of Community Development

Some definitions of community development are one-sided views, there is therefore need for clarification of the concept of community development. Amadei (2015) defined it as a process of empowering local

groups, strengthening the capacity of the community and its environs and supporting active democratic life. This definition only stresses things which need to be done to assist the community improve. Philips and Pittman (2009) see community development as a process of developing and enhancing the ability to act collectively, collective action and improvement in a community in any or all realms: physical, environmental, cultural, social, political, economic, etc. This definition suggests that community development can be measured in terms of certain actions expected from every member of a community and the resultant effect of such actions.

Drawing inspiration from these definitions, Wordu (2022) conceptualizes community development as personal and social development within a community. This definition viewed community development as a process as well as improvement. It is not just limited to processes of change but also involve change itself. Thus, community development can be seen as the seed of social change.

Traditional Community Development

Traditional community development is based on non-directive approach, which utilizes mutual help. For example, whenever there arises a problem which is of interest to the community, as a whole or a group within the community, such situation is tackled through their collective effort alone. Under this method, it helps communities construct roads, bridges and drainages; dig wells and build houses as well as engage in clearing farming plot areas, etc. The members of the community provide the human and material resources needed to implement projects, through donations, levies and sale of properties.

It operates through village gatherings of men and women, councils of elders, the age grade, women and youth groups. According to Nwangwu (2001) these are effective in mobilizing whole communities for development.

However, the traditional approach has various limitations, which makes it ineffective in meeting the needs of communities including inadequate human and material resources, poor management skills, poor production techniques. These limitations suggest that traditional community development cannot stand alone; rather it must be complemented by its modern counterpart. Modern community development is therefore needed in order to ensure the well-being of people and their communities.

The Issue of Community Development

The issue of community development revolves around the fact that its objectives are not achieved in rural areas (Wordu, 2020). For example, majorities suffer from food insecurity, unemployment, high rate of poverty and so on. Also, the greater populations have no access to clean water. A good number of children have not the opportunity of formal education. Also, the illiterate population is rising close to 50 percent. In addition, majority lack adequate orientation. A greater number do not have adequate housing, and access to modern health services.

Aristotle suggested that community development is the fundamental justification for the State, since the State must ensure that everyone realizes himself and becomes virtuous (Bishop & Ekenem, 2020). This is because for the State to be its true nature or to be described as perfect; it will have to ensure the conditions

necessary for all of its citizens to achieve complete human life (Bisong & Ekenem, 2020). This situation implies that the state is not carrying out its role well.

The Question of Participation

Participation is one of the core values of community development that have received a good degree of attention in its theory and practice. A merit of community participation is that it makes members of a community to accept that a development effort is theirs and to work to sustain it. The question is are the poor or underprivileged participating in development activities, which target improvement in the quality of life? However, evidence has shown that the poor may not be reached with benefits of development even if the process involved them. (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). As participation is not the answer to inequality, we must look for other means to address it.

Approaches to Community Development

There are three approaches to community development based on involvement of governmental authorities. These are the directive approach, matching-grant approach and non-directive approaches. In the directive approach some governmental agencies or ministries identify needs, plan programmes and they try to obtain cooperation from the various communities in carrying out these programmes. The main thrust of this method is total control by an outside agency due to the incapability of the community to embark on herculean or intensive capital projects. Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) noted that the government or outside agencies determine what is good for the people, that is, the needs of the people and how to meet such needs. They also play the major roles of planning and implementation of the community development project. This approach is mostly operational where illiteracy and ignorance is more prevalent.

Matching-grant approach manifest itself in the form of partnership between government and the community members. It is synonymous with self-help projects. The community initiates the project and provides as much resources as is possible to execute it. The parastatal, ministries or non-governmental agency supplies the staff, equipment, materials and programmes considered necessary for the success of the development activities embarked on. It is where government gives grant to a community to support a project at some point.

The non-directive approach is a situation where the community alone caters for developing its peoples and environment. The community bears the responsibility for development by themselves, they identify their needs by themselves, prioritize their needs by themselves and take action on the basis of the plan drawn. Governmental and non-governmental agencies may not interfere in the development process. It involves lifelong learning which is one of the conditions for their gainful participation in projects.

The best approach today should be the directive approach. Experience has shown that this approach leads to faster achievement of results and better funding of development projects. It makes it possible to incorporate the beneficiaries in decision making. Other approaches to community development are the specialized or sectorial approach and the generalize or integrated approach. The specialized approach is where external agency focuses on solving problems as they emerge in a community. For example,

developing a water project in a community or is building road in a neighbouring community to fix a dilapidated road. Critics consider this approach too narrow in dealing with problems of backward societies because they cannot really be solved in isolation.

The other, the generalized or integrated approach considers for development different aspects of community needs in a single programme. It involves empowering of the community members, creating basic infrastructures (like road, water, electricity, schools, hospitals) and developing housing and markets (Krusovan.d). It is also referred as interdisciplinary approach. It is the deliberate effort to connect the design, delivery and evaluation of programme across disciplines and sectors to produce an amplified lasting affect peoples' lives (Oyebamiji and Adekola, 2008). This is popular in Nigeria.

What is Learning?

Two perspectives on learning exist. Learning as change and learning as a process. Brookfield according to Nelson (2012) defines learning as a gerund word, as the process of acquiring skills, knowledge, positive values and attitudes. It connotes planned activities with educational values undertaken by people to develop their abilities, knowledge and skills. This type of learning must not be organized in standardized classroom settings (Wordu, 2018), but can be carried out anywhere the environment is suitable for learning – that is, the environment is none threatening or hazardous to people's health and work. It is characterized by learning by doing method. It also involves situational and reflective learning. Also, it combines both self-discovery and teaching. It is rooted in transformative theory of learning, but involves also experiential learning (Jarvis, 2004).

Concept of Learning Environment

The concept of learning environment is not confined to a physical environment such as a school, rather it embraces different places including homes, churches, farm, workplace, markets, training centres and workshop. Chakanika, Sichula and Sumbra in Onyeozu and Okorie, (2018) believed that the concept of learning environment should reflect the diversity of those present in the learning activity, itself, the curriculum, the wider and immediate institutional contexts in which the participants work, live and in some way the ever-changing needs of an increasingly diverse society.

How to create an Enabling Environment for Learning

This involves the following elements:

- i. Social development workers
- ii. Teacher education
- iii. Establishment of municipalities
- iv. Protected areas
- v. A climate of opinion
- vi. Removal of land use decree
- vii. Modern cooperatives
- viii. Lock-up shops

Social Development Workers

The presence of social development workers; in rural areas is a major step in creating an enabling environment for learning. They are public servants responsible for catering various functions of social development, including caring for family and child welfare, rehabilitation, youth mobilization and women and development, etc. They are concerned with mobilization for change through conscious rousing. Such workers must be well trained and well-informed on their areas of work and how to work with villagers before posting them to the communities. They hold meetings at village or community level to help villagers understand government plans and programmes. They engage institutional capacity building to assist in developing rural cooperatives and clubs.

Teacher Education

As no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers Obanya, (2020) observed that teachers' education must become critical part of learning. They may be involved in direct teaching or facilitating learning. For teachers to carry out their roles effectively, there must be room for their training and re-training. More so, we are in the digital age which has brought changes in curriculum implementation. Teachers need to be abreast of such changes like E-learning, etc.

Establishment of Municipalities

A municipality is a town or city that has a local government. There are limited numbers of such facilities in Nigeria. This is aimed to stimulate active engagement in public affairs/decision making. It will also lead to waking up of their latent but powerful gifts or talents. This ensures that they are involved in planning, coordinating implementing, evaluating and monitoring processes.

The essence of developing towns is for development to embrace those often marginalized, including women, youths and the less privileged. The cities must not be too large or small that resources can be utilized more efficiently and effectively.

Modern Cooperatives

Cooperatives are made up of persons doing a business together. There are various forms of co-operative societies include thrift, multi-purpose and professional-based societies, such as agricultural or mining cooperatives. Cooperative societies have been acknowledged as an important local development initiative (Nwangwn, 2001). One of its distractive characteristics is education. Co-operative societies place value on education of their members in the conduct of affairs and professional activities.

Members are given opportunity to learn not only the techniques of operating the organization but also to acquire knowledge and skills required for effective performance in their occupations. This makes people to invest in agriculture.

A Climate of Opinion

A climate of opinion exits in a democratic atmosphere. It is a situation in which people are free to and able to express their minds on any issue of public interest in public discussion and therefore they search for information to understand what is happening around them. As a result, they are able to examine issues

critically and make their opinions count.

This requires the role of the mass media such as radio and television because they provide access to information, as well as opportunity for people to engage in discussion on public matters.

Removal of Land Use Decree

The land use decree makes all lands-the property of the Federal Government. Government may use any of the land resources. This is a barrier to learning as peoples' learning is tied to their socioeconomic activities, such as farming, trading, small-scale business etc. Limited learning may occur if the sources are not accessible to a majority of the people.

Protected Areas

Protected Areas have their geographical boundaries and are legally occupied and managed to conserve natural resources, ecosystem services and cultural values. It is an important stock of natural, cultural and social capital, yielding flows of economically valuable goods and services for both individual communities and society at large. They serve as a resource for learning, training and research for all categories of learners (Blum, 2012), especially with respect to environmental learning. They are relevant as sources of learning at various levels from primary to higher education.

In Nigeria, National Parks and Game reserve constitute the greater proportion of protected areas system (Abdulazizi, 2015) and cover an area over three million hectares. These should be extended to rural areas for accessibility to all learners.

Lock-up Shop

The availability of lock-up shops in rural areas will not only increase access to such facilities but also access to learning opportunities that provide a wider spectrum of practical skills such as computer repairs, GSM repairs, electronics (radio, TV, etc.) repairs and sale of variety of products. It increases the volume of business in community and hence opportunities for learning

What are the Strategies for achieving Learning?

What is Strategy?

The word strategy refers to the method or means of doing something to meet a specified need or desire. It is about finding ways of reaching people. It can also refer to means of tracking organizational goals. The strategies to be adopted to achieve learning include;

Transformative learning

Transformative Learning refers to a shift in consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world (Morell & O' Connor cited in Baumgartner, 2003). This shift in consciousness suggests a different perception system, as against the one that the learner previously shared, imposed on him by the cultural context and has been unconsciously internalized through the process of socialization. Perception is the foundation to learning.

The rejection of an erroneous perception system, which is represented by false and distorted values, beliefs and assumptions can lead to removal of the cultural barriers to learning, which characterizes rural dwellers.

Transformative Education

We often take our spiritual – emotional learning for granted. Transformative education helps us to apply our spiritual – emotional learning to realities that we face in our day to day living. Transformative education is not mediated through language; rather It is associated with the use of symbols. Symbols are powerful images or motifs (Dirk, 1998), suggesting deep seated issues relating to a subject matter. Transformative educators help the learner to name, recognize and elaborate these images and establish intra-personal dialogue with them leading to a more integrated self. It implies improvement in the quality of life (Taylor, 2008). This makes them more open and receptive to learning.

Testing

Testing is a way or means of measuring the learning that occurred in a particular learning situation. Wali (2003) noted that there are two broad categories of test used in measuring learning which are non-referenced test and criterion – referenced test. Non-referenced test is administered to a group of learners to enable comparism of learning of another group, called the norm group. Criterion-referenced tests are designed to measure specific behaviours based on a particular criterion. Such tests can help one identify personal learning needs or gaps thereby facilitating learning. It may be constructed as free response or objectives test. Objective tests involve multiple choice, true or false, pairing and competence the sentence form (Ajoku, 2006).

Through Staffing

Staffing involves recruitment of qualified and competent workers who will be responsible for teaching and non-teaching activities. Both primary and secondary schools should have full time staff. Those to teach in adult programmes may be full time or part time staff.

Through teaching Personal Competencies

Personal competencies enable an individual to learn more effectively and to interact efficiently with other people. They are associated with social skills such as abilities to grasp situations quickly, creativity skills, flexibility skill, readiness to cooperate, ability to put up with frustration, reliability and ability to learn and adapt (Nwangwu, 2001).

Mechanism for Reducing Illiteracy

The best approach to illiteracy in rural areas is through functional literacy education. It is teaching literacy in a meaningful, sustaining and practical oriented manner. The functional approach makes the lessons adapted to the environment of the learner such as his occupation or profession, his need for active participation in decision making at local levels, etc. This helps to raise their functional level in everything. For example, adapting literacy teaching to modern agriculture practice. The functional approach is favored by modern work place training. It is promoted by international organization including United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (ihejirika, 2000).

Conclusion

In rural areas, if community development is to bring about desirable changes in individuals and their community, it must operate based on a conducive learning environment. The components of a conducive environment for learning includes: social development workers, teacher education, cooperatives, establishment of municipalities, protected areas, a climate of opinion, among others. Based on this, it is possible to conclude that economic, social, cultural, political and educational factors are involved in forming enabling environment for learning in rural areas. It can also be concluded that learning requires a different ball game which combines conventional and transformative approaches.

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