

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS A SUSTAINABLE PATHWAY TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Community approach to development is a key strategy to national development. Within the context of contemporary discourse basic development need is a major theme, this is because basic needs when met will ultimately impact on national development. Meeting the actual needs of the poor rural dwellers will ultimately unleash national development especially in developing societies. Though various theories of development like capitalist, modernization and socialist theories have been in practice sadly they are not able to adequately address the challenges of development hence the search for alternative approaches that can address and provide a more realistic alternative. This implies that the emphasis have shifted from industrial growth to real growth and equity that can alleviate poverty. Despite previous attempt, 70% of the rural population are still poor, hence the need to demystify these approaches and adopt strategies that can sustain real development. This is what the paper seeks to address.

Introduction

The interest in defining basic human needs (BHN) is not entirely new. Though today's interest in basic needs is somewhat different, the satisfaction of basic needs however they are defined is taken to be a universal priority. Basic Need Approach" (BNA) according to Stewart (1985) is "one which gives priority to meeting the basic needs of all the people". This universalism in the rights of all to the satisfaction of basic needs is expressed in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25(1), adopted with the Declaration in 1948 which states thus: *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (cited in Wisner 1988:25).* Various development programmes and policies have emerged in contemporary development discourses with focus on addressing the fundamental needs and aspirations of rural people in Nigeria,

who constitute over 70% of the population, and have benefited relatively little from the economic growth models of development for past years. Sustainable rural development is basically centered on meeting not only the imaginary/perceived needs of the people, but the real/felt needs diagnosed through a carefully planned strategy of Rural Needs Assessment/Evaluation (RNA).

An overall evaluation of various development strategies and programmes in Nigeria seem not to achieve desired result both in relative and absolute terms, in meeting the basic concerns of the rural populace. These programme initiators/implementers lack real conception of basic sustainable needs of the rural people due to the mere manifestation of faulty policies and design to achieve these lofty goals. The absence of adequate information on the Nigerian rural setting in terms of felt needs has made their true characters unknown before planning the type and nature of the development that should be initiated. Projects are started without planning to satisfy the demands of the people; hence their expectant results are in

no less, unfulfilled expectations (Igbozuruike 1977:171). In most cases, urban based literate policy makers who know next to nothing about the actual needs and peculiarities of rural dwellers plan rural-based projects. In the absence of a thorough user-study or analysis of needs, the result is that unwanted projects are planned, or required ones are fashioned in a manner unsuitable for the illiterate, poor rural dwellers. This paper intends to demystify the concept of basic needs for effective application in sustainable rural development.

Contextualizing the problem

Sustainable development of the rural areas have to do with "Needs Assessment" and the qualitative improvement in the living standards of the rural poor. Thus, in planning for any basic need programme, and before any community development programme can be set up, it is necessary to determine what needs are most crucial and, what needs are, that the programme is trying to meet. (Olawoye, 1994:133). This issue of need according to Sokoya and Ekong (1982) is very crucial in determining the success of Community Development (CD) programmes as it directly relates to the level that people will feel in such projects. A nationwide survey by Idachaba (1985) in collaboration with Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development on rural infrastructure in Nigeria, as well as current surveys on the dismal state of the rural people revealed significant disparity among states and broad ecological regions in available supplies of rural infrastructure. Probable causative factors of the disparities were partly attributed to historical factors and partly due to varying kinds of seriousness and commitment of successive Local and State governments to the issue of rural basic needs and rural welfare. (Idachaba, 1985).

From a critical assessment of the various rural development programmes and strategies proposed and initiated by various governments, one is not surprised to note that most rural communities are significantly not different from what they were several years past. In spite of all orchestrated policies and programmes, the problems of rural backwardness and under development in terms of rural basic needs have remained unresolved. Majority of the rural poor are still deprived of the basic amenities for survival. The evidence of persistent rural backwardness is amply manifested in hunger, absolute poverty, disease, ignorance, unemployment and underemployment, poor housing, rural-urban migration, and several other problems that characterize the rural populace. Consequently, most rural communities still live without portable drinking water, electricity, good roads, hospitals and health centers, among others. (Oladuni 1996; CBN, 1997). This according to Aboyade (1987) implies that the rural sector has most invariably lagged behind in the rate of development. and therefore constitutes a drag on national development as a whole. This further suggests that socio-economic infrastructural facilities are highly deficient in the rural areas. One of the contention of this work is that the enduring and worsening conditions of the rural people and their areas stem from government's faulty conceptualization of rural basic needs and execution of rural development policies and programmes that are not conscious of these concerns. Schumacher (1975:168) points out, "development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organisation, and discipline. Without these three factors, all resources remain latent, untapped and potential". Because rural development is based on the needs assessment of the rural communities, it is

therefore important that the identification of community needs be considered as a priority, since there will be no sustainability without provision for community members to take control of their own lives and their needs (Jegade, 1998:77). Community development programmes must change its orientation from the "traditional top-down" approach to the "progressive bottom-up" approach. Given the fact that the top-down, "paternalist approach" could hardly serve the immediate needs of the rural people, the people-centered approach could be seen as a means of meeting locally felt needs and also redistribute scarce resources. This paper is therefore anchored on the fact that the missing link towards sustainable rural development drive is the failure of some rural-based projects to stand the test of time if embarked upon without a proper "Needs Assessment" of the rural areas. Not all rural areas need the same type of projects or basic needs. One may be advanced than the other in achieving some of their needs. To merely engage in the same type of rural projects without proper information on the peculiarities of the people, is an invitation to failure (Nwokocho and Ubegbu, 1999:169).

Materials and Methods

In putting up this write-up, the authors derived data from secondary (published) sources which were content analysed to suit the context for which the paper served. The content analysis are derived from the works of experts in the field of community development, and Basic Needs Approaches in countries where they have been implemented.

The Concept of Basic Human Needs

The concept of need is one of the cardinal or central principles of community development programme (Abasiekong, 1982). Since community development is a problem

solving process, there must be there cognition or identification of a problem or need. Thus Abasiekong (1982) reemphasized thus: *"at the heart of every community development programme is a recognized need; that until there is an appreciation of need, it is very difficult if not impossible to get a community development programme underway, or started"*. He further reiterated that the recognition of needs must be expressed in specific term.

A Need starts with a Problem: These problems must have evolved as a result of the gradually changing conditions affecting the community, or it may have developed out of a crisis situation.

Understand the problem The causes and implications of the problem need to be understood. This according to him, may necessitate careful study of the problem and its future implications for the community.

Develop a concern for doing something about the problem: Communities must be motivated to action. They must be motivated, and indeed have a feeling of discontent with the existing conditions before any programme of community development can be initiated.

Express the Situation in terms of felt needs:

It is not until the concern for doing something is expressed in specific terms by the community as a whole, that a basis for action is established. This, he called Felt Needs. Abasiekong further noted that it is only when the felt needs come to be expressed in terms of agreed upon goals that the basis for community action is established. Knox (1975:6) noted that the term "Need" is like "poverty", which is a very relative term. He equates the term "Need" with "well-being"; - which refers to the satisfaction of needs and wants to the population. According to him, for each element of well-

being (health, food, housing, clothing, education etc) one can attempt to define minimum quantities and qualities that equate with Needs; but that these minima vary according to prevailing value systems and norms. Akeredolu-Ale (1984:9-10) conceptualizes the concept "need" with terms as "Concerns", "Aspirations" and "Expectations". To him, "Concerns" are the things that a person or the society considers very important, and feel that policy makers should attach great weight in the formulation of policies, which affects them. Such concerns may take the form of personal or social problems, which the individual or society sees as deserving urgent solutions. They may also take the form of prevailing situations or part therefore, which the individual sees as undesirable or the lack of specific services, facilities or opportunities that the individual or group considers essential to his life quality. Akeredolu-Ale further defines "Aspirations" as "desires, especially those desires to which the individual or community concerned attaches great importance.

Aspirations here refer to the life-goals of the individual or society - what the people would like to do or achieve, but also what they want to avoid or to see removed from their lives. By "expectations", he meant the element of the peoples forecast of their quality of life (QOL) and other experiences. Expectations in this context are different from aspirations in that what any individual or society desires need not coincide with what is expected to be achieved. In conceptualizing the term "Needs", Akeredolu-Ale posited that certain needs of the individual or society are a function of that individual's or society's concern and aspirations, which usually take the form of what things (facilities) they would like to have (or to avoid having). Such desired things

may include material objects, particular services/facilities, opportunities or experiences or the various inner gratifications, which psychologists considers as "Needs", and regards as the most fundamental determinants of motivation. Such psychological needs include the need for achievement, for security, for the approval and respect of other people (i.e. social needs), for autonomy, for power, etc. Since an individual's needs are a function of his total situation (physical-environmental, economic, political, social, cultural and psychological), the needs of different individuals and groups of individuals will tend to vary due to differences in the character of their total situation.

Okoye (1997:160-161) in his own perception, sees the concept of basic needs in terms of three core values of development which relate to fundamental human needs, namely, life sustenance, self-esteem and freedom from servitude. Life sustenance simply means the ability to provide basic necessities of life (basic needs), such as shelter, health and protection without which life would be impossible. Self-esteem which has to do with the need for a sense of worth, self-respect, dignity, honour and recognition is a second universal component of good life. The third component of good life has to do with freedom or emancipation from alienating material conditions of life. Another useful catalogue in the description of need typologies is the product of a long, multinational dialogue concerning the elements of "quality of life" (OECD, 1976 summarized by Carr-Hill, 1978:7-8):

- Without a minimal level of health, one cannot biologically survive, hence health is basic.
- The essence of humanity is knowledge so that without learning there is no real

human existence, hence education is basic.

- Man or woman is defined by what he/she does; hence the essential nature of a person depends upon the characteristics of their employment and quality of (their) working life.
- Man or woman is defined by his or her creativity so that the way in which he/she spends his time and the types of leisure available are basic to the definition of existence.
- An income and economic security are the pre-requisite of satisfying material needs so that livelihood depends on one's personal economic situation.
- A physical shelter and hospitable environment are essential for warmth, food and water, hence the physical environments are basic.
- The social relationships within which our daily life is enmeshed define our personality; hence the nature of the personality depends on the social environment.
- Men and women's life are nasty, brutish and short without mutual protection so that personal safety and the correct administration of justice is fundamental.
- The prevailing social organisation permits all other forms of activity (or even existence), socially defined and so the type of inequality and social participation is basic.

The programme of action of the ILO (1976:182) defined needs as:

- i. Strategies and national development plans and policies that should include explicitly as a priority objective, the promotion of employment and the satisfaction of the basic needs of each country's population.

- ii. Basic needs, as understood in this programme of action include two elements. First, they include certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption, adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as certain household equipments, and furniture. Secondly, they include essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport and health, educational and cultural facilities.
- iii. A basic needs-oriented policy implies the participation of the people in making the decisions which affect them through organisations of their own choice.
- iv. In all countries, freely chosen employment centers into a basic needs policy both as a means and as an end.

Balancing peoples' needs with government notion of needs

In most societies, there is a delicate problem of balancing between the needs and wishes of individuals and collectives, and the needs and wishes of the government. Thus, Harvey (1973) argues that "felt needs" are not always equivalent to "real Needs". He noted that in some instances/situations, ignorance or misinterpretation can lead poorly served groups to have minimal felt needs. In other words, they do not feel deprived because they do not recognize the possibility of being better off. Ekong (1988:384), while supporting the above assertion, noted that rural people do not know their real needs" which are often "irrelevant" and "unrealistic". Good enough (1963:59), cited in Ekong (1988:384), identified four (4) views of community's needs, viz: **first, is the agent's view with his own goals in mind. *Second, is the agents view with his clients (the community) goals in mind; *third, is the clients view of what is*

*appropriate to the agent's goals; and *fourth, is the client's views of what should be done to achieve their own goals (i.e. their felt needs).*

He further posited that at most times; technical consultants appraise their client's circumstances and draw conclusions about their needs with reference to only one of these four perspectives. Good enough. infact, concludes that, "recommendations are almost invariably based on what the technical experts themselves want for their clients or assume a prior that their clients want". What Good-enough concludes here is that, a community's felt needs must be met, or at least recognized and sympathized with before there can be any hope of success in tackling "agent identified needs" or "real need". He noted that many unsuccessful community programmes have often been those that were based on a presumed "real" rather than the actual "felt" needs of the people. Sharing similar views, Sopher (1981) noted that the language of needs is very often used by political authorities to justify policies imposed from above on people. In the same vein. Stewart (1982:2) regards the political commitments to basic needs as leaving open the question concerning the means by which this objective is achieved.

Akeredolu-Ale (1985:6) in line with Good-enough, identified three possible notions of what the concerns of the people are; viz:

- i. The government's notion
- ii. The people's notion and
- iii. The expert's/intellectual notion

He stressed that in a democratic political system, the peoples' notion must prevail over any other notions: but that a serious problem arises in ascertaining what these notions are: he explained further that, whereas all democratically constituted governments usually claim to know and to be addressing the concerns of their people, the truth is that invariably, governments are themselves an

expression of the particular interests in society and often address the concerns of those particular interests rather than, and if need be, at the expense of the concerns of the rest of society.

Finally, he observed that it is important for intellectuals to remain in touch with the reality of the people's existence through systematic research, (what could be seen as Needs Assessment/evaluation), as this was the only way to ensure that intellectuals themselves have valid knowledge of what the people's concerns are. This way, he argued, there could be a high level of correspondence between the people's notion and intellectual's notion of what the people's concerns are

Prerequisites and facilitating factors for successful basic development needs programme

Abdullatiff (1999:170) in a critical assessment of the "Basic Development Needs Approach (BDN" in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, pointed out a number of factors which are important to launch and sustain a successful BDN programme. These factors are:

- i. **Political Commitment:** Different forms of political commitments are necessary to make BDN schemes thrive. According to him, the experience of Thailand and Jordan is a clear evidence of the importance of having a defined vision and support by the highest authority. In Nigeria, political commitment to the attainment of basic need development projects are quite uncertain, hence the high level of neglect.
- ii. **Organized structure:** The more the country is structured administratively and politically and the more there is a wide network of this structure at the grassroots, the more it is conducive and supportive to BDN schemes, which are

usually launched at the grassroots level. He noted that the social structure at the local level is also important to nurture the different activities of BDN.

- iii. **Heritage and Culture:** He noted here that community participation and solidarity are facilitating factors in BDN schemes where communities are the decisive factors in development.
- iv. **Interests** by all parties: Here, Abdullatiff states that the government should raise awareness in the community involved, mobilizing real involvement at all stages, example planning and implementation. The approach provides both community and government with an agenda for working together for overall development. It facilitates matching community identified needs with the government's normative needs.
- v. **Timeliness of BDN Schemes:** Success of BDN scheme is felt more when it is started in needy places. The impact of the BDN approach is soon noticed when sectors and communities see the speed, effective needs, and overall impact in their areas. Wrong timing of projects could account for the failure of such programmes (Abasiokong, 1982).
- vi. **Information Sharing:** Abdullatiff noted here that information sharing should be a continuous process. Each community should be made aware of their situation through joint surveys with formal government, agency sectors and themselves. This is in addition to continuously assessing improvements in their own areas. Government plans for local development should also be shared with the community. It is worthy to note that these factors are not put in order, nor are they all prerequisites at the same

locality. A successful BDN project has to be adapted to the local set-up.

ACHIEVING BASIC NEEDS OF THE RURAL PEOPLE:

It has been noted earlier that the inability of individuals in a society to achieve basic necessities of life such as the needs for food, clothing, shelter, portable water, health services, basic education, public transportation, and work; subjects them to poverty, hunger and misery. Apart from the community development and participatory approaches to meeting the basic needs of the rural poor, several other approaches have been advocated. Okunmadewa (1997:14-15) in a paper titled: "Nigeria: Poverty Reducing Growth Strategies and Options", noted that successful poverty reducing strategy in Nigeria requires a strong and focused emphasis on economic growth, access to social services and infrastructure, and targeting. He noted that to gradually reduce the number of people in poverty, growth must not only be rapid but also broad-based and employment generating. In terms of social services and infrastructure, sustained long term-growth depends critically upon increase in the access of poor people to quality social services and essential infrastructure in order to enable them increase their human capital and make full use of their main assets, namely their labour. Key priorities in this case should be health, education, water supplies and sanitation, rural roads, etc.

According to him, this requires an increase in funding in order to expand the number of facilities, and to improve service at each facility; as well as make access sustainable through increased community participation in the development and maintenance of infrastructure and provision of services. Government can target the delivery of some services and resources to

reach poor areas and to communities living in poverty, building an existing community-based organisations and activities, where possible

(Okunmadewa 1997:15). In making a strong case for a new initiative on poverty alleviation in Nigeria, the poverty alleviation programme development committee of the National Planning Commission suggested thus: *"a poverty programme should contain a large number of relatively small, well targeted demand driven projects and sub-projects that can be implemented by the communities themselves". (Cited in CBN World Bank collaborative study, 1997:16. This initiative named "Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA)"; has its core elements as the provision of a support mechanism to finance projects which are initiated, proposed, and implemented by the intended beneficiaries (poor groups and communities) with the support of CBO's and NGO's where necessary. Ozumba(1997:206-209) specifically noted two strategies towards meeting the goals of rural development: The "Conventional Strategies", which includes the collectivization of agriculture, intensification of supply of social amenities approach, increasing agricultural production approach, accelerated project implementation approach, rural (community development approach, humanistic approach, as well as the Community- Grouping approach; and the "integrated rural development strategy". According to him, integrated rural development is a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach of all persons and agencies concerned, aimed at involving rural people in determining policies, in planning and implementing of programmes designed to improve their economic, social and cultural conditions: and enable them to make a positive contribution to national development. This approach emphasizes the need to involve*

the rural poor in the development processes. This approach advocates that since the rural poor live in the rural areas, they know their basic needs and will be invaluable in policy making, co-ordination and implementation of policies. For the strategy to be meaningful, it has to take into consideration the development needs of the rural areas in question. Ozumba(1997:207) in a preview of approaches and strategies for boosting rural development vis-à-vis meeting basic needs advocated the "Social Amenities Approach". Implicit in this approach is the need to supply (or provide) the rural people with adequate social amenities needed for the survival of the rural community: Advocates of this strategy believed that as soon as these amenities are made available, development will spontaneously result on its own. This implies that no development could actually come without the provision. of these amenities. Ugal (1992) in his own contention argues that an attempt to understand the development process at the grassroots' level implies the full grasp with those community-based organisations around which the people have always organized themselves for the collective improvement of the living conditions of their communities.

Conclusion

The dismal state of social infrastructures among the rural poor could reasonably serve as a pointer to the poor quality of living of the rural dwellers, and also that the past and present rural development programmes/policies have not significantly met their basic needs. A cursory look at the quality of the rural poor reveals the existence of poverty with its crushing effects, which to a significant extent is the major factor responsible for their persistent low living standards. To ensure the fulfillment of rural basic needs there is the need for a

practicable and feasible strategy. Achieving basic needs of a typical rural people requires a multi-dimensional approach where local effort initiatives are quite necessary for the perceived beneficiaries. A basic need approach should be rooted in the satisfaction of locally defined needs by the use of local human and physical resources. Therefore, sustained long term growth with poverty reduction vis-à-vis-oriented social services. Access could be made sustainable through increased community participation in the development of infrastructure and provisions of services.

Policy Recommendations

The achievement of sustainable development of the rural areas via the basic needs approach involves the following policy actions.

- i. The incorporation of the (poor) rural people in planning and execution of basic needs oriented development programmes and projects.
- ii. The formation of community action programmes for Poverty Alleviation which will focus on the provision of support mechanisms to finance projects which are initiated, proposed and implemented by the intended beneficiaries (poor groups and communities). (iii) Tailoring sponsored community development programmes to meet the development initiatives and socio cultural conditions of the rural areas.
- iii. Embarking on self-help development efforts on the part of the respective rural areas.
- iv. The involvement of both local and international non-governmental organisations in the delivery of need packages for the rural poor.

- v. Carrying out intensive and extensive need assessment, evaluation and prioritization before the planning and execution of basic development projects.

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