

Local Government Community-Participation In Execution And Management Of Development Projects

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Abstract

Government is no longer “Father Christmas” they only help those who help themselves. That probably explains why development literature has shifted emphasis from paternalistic approach by government to that of join-cooperative strategy with its communities. The paper examined local government community participation in Execution of development projects using integrative theoretical framework of analysis. Specifically, we identified the framework that such participation can take place, x-rayed different forms or strata of such participation; highlighted the benefits of local government-community participation and out-lined the obstacles that usually hinder such participation among others. The paper discovered that real and meaningful development cannot take place without government involving its communities after all democracy demands wider participation of citizenry in the management of their affairs. Based on the findings the paper recommended a harmonious and more workable local government community participation approach in execution of development projects as a development out of extreme necessity.

Introduction

There is universal acceptance of local government as a vital instrument for rural and urban developments, irrespective of the ideological differences of societies and levels of development.

Accordingly, Alhaji Abubakar Rim put it aptly:

Local government is the most important government of our land. It is the nearest and most immediate government for the man. The man in my village does not know who the president is, he does not even care who the governor of Kano is... He cares only about those who are councilors and chairman of his local government. (Constituent Assembly; 1978:994).

One of the major reasons for establishing Local Government is to bring government to the local communities so that the local people can participate fully in the process of governance, in order to provide essential local services and thus speed up the pace of social, economic and political development (Ogunna, 1996). Following this fundamental purpose of local government, the Guidelines on the 1976 Local Government reforms makes community participation imperative on Local Government. The principal objectives of the Reform as provided by the Guidelines were to:

- (a) make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiative by devolving and delegating them to local representative bodies;
- (b) facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the local levels of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potential;
- (c) mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development;
- (d) provide a two-way, channel of communication between local communities and government (both state and federal).

Consequently, nations have been battling for the establishment of viable local government that will bring both government and development nearer to the people.

However, the role of local government as a developmental intermediary between the grass root people in the national scheme of things is diminishing at alarming rate. Investigation conducted so far, attributes it to lack of accountability by operators of the system, corruption and present global economic melt down.

But as a government widely acknowledged as a viable instrument for delivery of essential services to the people, anything that, affects its smooth

operation will definitely affect adversely, the lives of the citizenry. That is why, we are calling for government-community participation in development projects.

As Onah (1999) has rightly pointed out, government-community participation in execution of community development projects is not new in Nigeria. This has been demonstrated in communities building schools and government providing the teachers and equipments. Communities are also known to have participated in building health centres, providing rural electricity, pipe-born water and constructing roads. These are even sometimes carried out by communities unaided. Nnadozie (1986) quoted in Onah (1999) was of the view that communities providing development projects for themselves was the process through which the people lived and improved their lot before contact was made with the colonial powers.

Definitely, the management of these community projects or services is as important as their provision. Proper management of community development projects would ensure that they provide the expected services efficiently and also have a long life span. Having said this, the question then arises:

1. Under what framework and institutions can government-community participation take place?
2. What are the different forms or strata of community participation in development projects?
3. What are the benefits of government-community participation in execution of development projects?
4. What are the obstacles to effective government-community cooperation in community development projects?
5. What were the prospects for improved government-community cooperation in the management of community development projects?

This paper, will, therefore, attempt to find answers to the above questions.

Framework of Government Community Cooperation

Community mobilization or citizen participation is indispensable to the effective implementation and management of development projects. This view attracts widespread consensus. What is needed is clearer analysis of this concept to see which forms of participation, benefits which groups or classes in the process (Lassen 1979). It is also important that since democracy is the most widely acclaimed form of government, there can be no democracy

without community participation. In fact, the most widespread participation in communal affairs is an ideal worth pursuing by all democratic systems.

Although there is a consensus view on the need for community cooperation in development projects. Identifying who participates and the manner of participation has been an enduring problem. This view has been reaffirmed by Strange (1973:69) and Resner (1978:54). Strange identifies three different areas of community participation/cooperation namely:

- (i) in the decision-making structure of the programme;
- (ii) in the advisory panel; and
- (iii) through staff employment of the designated group whose cooperation is sought.

There is a structural linkage between communities and government institutions in execution of community development projects. Framework for government-community participation includes age grades, town unions and other social groups. In addition traditional rulers, leaders of thought (LOTS) and Non-Government Organizations can constitute catalyst agents for government-community cooperation in the management of community development projects. An important role of such agents would be to bring the local government agents into greater awareness of the needs of the community and to mobilize the citizens for more effective participation.

Forms/Levels of Government-Community Participation in Development Projects

Citizen participation in development projects can be in different forms and at different levels. Lassen (1979) identifies these forms as follows:

- (i) Participation in the decision-making on what the service or project should be;
- (ii) Participation in the implementation of a service or project;
- (iii) Participation in evaluation of performance of project administrators or quality of service; and
- (iv) Participation in control over how the project or service is directed in the long run.

(i) Participation in decision-making on what the projects should be

It has already been mentioned in the course of this paper that a major principle of community development is that the citizens or members of the community must identify their felt needs. The community must identify the negative social condition which the project is expected to address. This is important because every community has various needs at any particular time.

Hence a community that perceives its most pressing need as a motor able road is likely to be lukewarm over building a school or hospital. On the other hand, drilling a borehole in a community that suffers from the acute shortage of portable water would generate a lot of enthusiasm and cooperation. Consequently, the community must be actively involved in this decision stage. The local government agent or community development officer must therefore establish channels of communication with town union, age grades, leaders of thought (LOTS) and other community based organizations (CBOs). The agent should meet with the leaders of these groups who would provide information as regards the pressing needs of the community and hence what the project should be. It is also pertinent to note that the community development officer, being an expert, should provide leadership at this selection stage. He has to guide the people by explaining the various ramifications of every project choice. Popular participation in decision making elicits local initiative in problem solving and ensures that enough resources are mobilized voluntarily.

(ii) Participation in the Implementation of a Service or Project

Projects and programmes are very closely interrelated, the difference existing only in scope. This difference lies in the fact that while a project may consist of only a single activity a programme consists of a series of activities or projects.

It is a common knowledge that many well formulated programmes fail because they were badly implemented. In Nigeria, cases of such programme abound ranging from the environmental Sanitation programme to poverty alleviation programmes, in community project or programmes which are directed towards providing for the basic needs of the people, the effective cooperation and mobilization of the people therefore becomes a panacea for effective implementation.

As in the case of programme selection, the local government can secure this necessary cooperation by liaising with community leaders, leaders of age grades, other CBOs and the community development committees (CDCs) which are features of most communities in the Southern part of Nigeria. Through these individuals or group of individuals government can then mobilize the citizens in the various organizations. Government community cooperation in the implementation of community development projects or programmes can be in financial, personnel or physical resources. To this effect, the catalyst agents mentioned above can impose and assist in collecting levies to argument government resources. This has been the case in

the rural water supply schemes in the country. Here communities are expected to deposit a specified amount with the government before the commencement of the commissioning of their boreholes. In addition, the community is solely responsible for the maintenance of the pumps and other running costs. In order to be able to accomplish these tasks communities charge some meager amounts on those who benefit from the bore-hole.

Another non-financial area of cooperation is that communities are charged with safeguarding the installations. They may do that by providing direct labour or employing and paying an individual to render the services. These activities can best be organized through the community institutions already mentioned. It is known that age grades and community development committees collect levies through collection teams that sometimes move from one household to another and properties of defaulters are impounded until they are able to meet their obligations. This form of cooperation/participation by the community is most crucial where there are physical assets such as electricity transformers, cables and water pumps.

(iii) Participation in Evaluating of Performance of Project Administrators or Quality of Service

Three sets of activities are involved in the evaluation process: measuring outputs (performance measurement), comparing output performance against the desired results, and correcting any deviations or inadequacies (Adamolekun, 1983) in Gboyengage (1981:91). Community cooperation in the evaluation of project administrators and quality of service can be achieved by scheduled visits to the various identified CBOs by local government agents. During these visits, issues bordering on evaluation will be raised and feedback got from the citizens. The community development officer should also explain to the people the expected outcome or performance of a particular service/programme. Through these means, inadequacies can be identified and ways of rectifying them also discussed. For instance, if it is a rural electrification programme and the areas already electrified experience low voltage, the citizens would be enlightened on the possible causes, and the way out, which is to reduce the over-loading that often arises from illegal connections.

(iv) Participation in Control over how the Project or Service is Directed in the Long Run

Monitoring and control are also important aspect of programme management. There is often a tendency for government or agencies to back

out as soon as a particular community based programme is completed or a project is commissioned. This should not be the case. It is actually obligatory on local government. The 1979 Constitution, Fourth schedule stipulate that local governments are to provide rural roads, health centres, provision of pipe-borne water and rural electrification. The responsibility of the government should not and cannot end with the provision of these amenities but should extend to ensuring that they provide the necessary services and undergo minimal depreciation through adequate care and maintenance. Consequently, while communities should take charge of ensuring security of the physical structures, major damages should be promptly rectified by the government. The role of the CDC and community leaders in this respect should be to inform the government promptly. Even where the community would be asked to contribute to the repairs, the government should demonstrate genuine concern and effort to assist. Where possible, a community based committee consisting of representatives from the various sections benefiting from the programme should be set up to direct the activities.

Benefits of Local Government Community Participation in Development Projects

The benefits of community participation in development projects cannot be exhaustively discussed in the course of this paper. However, we wish to state that community participation:

- (i) Helps to define community needs and priorities much more accurately.
- (ii) Reduces cost by mobilizing unused local, human and material resources.
- (iii) Helps people to appreciate, understand and sympathise with government policies and actions.
- (iv) It contributes to political stability
- (v) It speeds up the process of social change among the people.
- (vi) It results in better decisions compared with those determined solely by professionals and administrative bureaucracies and
- (vii) It is a useful learning experience which provides much of the motivating forces needed in the execution of such projects.

In the olden days, communities that were hardly linked by foot paths were known to have agreed to mobilize their citizens to open up the roads and construct bridges across major rivers to facilitate easy movement of people from one community to another and also for trade. Communities

voluntarily put their resources together in form of labour in the execution of community projects. In this way roads, schools, public offices incinerators public toilets, residential accommodation etc were constructed through the active participation of the people. During that period the mechanism for community participation in development was very reliable. The communities relied on the use of age groups to mobilize people to participate actively in development programmes. Sometimes families were required to donate in kind e.g logs, roofing sheets etc to accomplish the execution of the projects.

The 1976 Local Government reform re-emphasized the need for community participation as follows:

- (i) Making appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by developing or delegating them to local representative bodies and
- (ii) Mobilizing human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development.

Factors that inhibit effective government-community cooperation and mobilization process

In the course of this paper, we have tried to identify the different forms of government-community cooperation and the organs through which they can be effected. It is however, incorrect to assume that once these organs are there, government-community cooperation goes on unhindered. The possible inhibiting factors on this exercise are therefore the focus of this section and they are discussed below.

5.1 An important factor that inhibits effective government-community cooperation is local community politics. In a community that is heterogeneous in character in terms of population cooperation becomes intractable. The smaller units entertain fear of being dominated by the larger units and this creates an atmosphere of distrust.

Under this condition, sectional interest now guides decisions about programme/project selection, amount of levies to be contributed by each section of the community and representation in community based committees also become highly politicized. The situation is further aggravated where the traditional ruler of the community is unpopular. He then becomes a divisive instrument in the community instead of one who brings cohesions. He also becomes ineffective as a catalyst for community mobilization.

5.2 Insufficient fund arising from widespread poverty and biting economic conditions militates against effective government-community cooperation in programme implementation. Experience has shown that members of various communities are finding it increasingly difficult to pay levies imposed on them for the maintenance of existing community welfare services. For instance, occasionally, electricity transformers break down and water pumping machines develop faults. These cost a lot of money which may not be readily available, hence the common sight of such facilities lying unprepared for years.

5.3 Corruption is another obstacle to effective community participation in development projects or programmes. For instance, Town Union or Community Development Committee officials sometimes misappropriate funds meant for financing community welfare programmes. This act aggravates the problem of shortage of fund which has already been discussed.

5.4 There is also the problem of inadequate communication between the local government and various communities. The local government authority has the important function of encouraging community cooperation through frequent communication with the various CBOs in its area of authority. Communication gap can make citizens ignorant of the roles they are expected to play in the developmental process. Through regular communication and interaction with community representatives local government officials will be in a position to discover and address the problems the various communities experience in their developmental efforts.

5.5 Shortage of skilled manpower within the communities to assist in the maintenance of development projects services also militates against effective community participation. Maintenance of some of the community welfare facilities such as electricity, health centres and even pipe borne water require skills, which may not be readily available in rural communities.

5.6 Party politics has also created division with communities. This has militated against effective community mobilization. The political elites and fanatical party members always disagree among themselves over sharing of available few resources. Consequently, as part of politicking, they refuse to cooperate in any venture spearheaded by a person from the opposing party. Even where a political opponent is the head of the town union or CDC, they refuse to see anything good in what he does. In the same way, such party

fanatics discourage unsuspecting citizens from supporting community welfare programmes not organized by their party members. For instance, where citizens are levied for the hire of a bulldozer for road rehabilitation, they may dissuade them from paying by making them feel that the government had provided the service free of charge and that the organizers were merely extorting money from them, which they would embezzle.

5.7 Finally, marginalization of women and discriminative behaviour against them places obstacles on the path of effective mobilization. Women for cultural practices and other related reasons are treated as second class citizens in many communities. Their own contribution is thus lost under such treatment.

Suggestions for Improved Government-Community Participation in Development Projects or Programmes

The identification of a problem is the first step toward its solution. We have highlighted some factors that militate against effective government-community cooperation in community welfare programmes. It is our conviction that if the following measures are adopted there will be significant improvement in the situation.

6.1 A major means of minimizing cliquism and acrimony in local communities is the installation of a popular person in the community as the traditional ruler. A popular traditional ruler will become an instrument of cohesion in his community. He will be able to settle misunderstandings which if allowed to escalate, can mar the progress of the community. The entire community will be loyal to him hence he can easily motivate and mobilize them to cooperate with the government in community welfare programmes.

6.2 Widespread poverty and shortage of financial resource have remained intractable problems in Nigeria and most third world countries. Based on the observed condition of a community, the government should determine the amount of financial burden a community can bear. Where it is obvious that a particular community is grossly financially handicapped, the government should emphasize non-financial cooperation such as direct labour where necessary.

6.3 Accountability in the management of community funds must be ensured. Local authorities should make it mandatory for the town union and community development committee officials to present progress report and statements of account to communities at specified intervals.

6.4 The posting of all-purpose village level workers (VLW) to various communities will enhance government-community cooperation in development projects or programmes. The VLW is expected to be resident in the community and also a source of permanent link between the government and the community. He will transmit information about the wants and needs of the community to the government and do likewise in terms of government expectations from the community. This will close the communication gap that often exists between government and communities.

6.5 The acrimony associated with party politics in our communities is reminiscent of what obtains at both state and national levels. Just as this vice slows down cooperation with government and national development, so it does at the community level. We hereby make a clarion call for enlightened party politics at all levels in Nigeria. The local government should after 'putting its house in order', echo this call to the communities through the various institutions already mitigating the negative effect of party politics on government-community participation in development projects or programmes.

6.6 Women should be more and more involved in community activities, especially programmes that affect their welfare. Better decisions are reached when a reasonable cross section of the communities are involved. This will be achieved by reaching out to women.

Conclusion

In this paper, a modest attempt has been made to examine government-community cooperation in mobilizing people for social welfare services and observed that they are varied and can also be used interchangeable with community development projects or programmes. The importance of government-community participation or cooperation and citizen mobilization underscored in the Guidelines for 1976 Local Government Reform was revisited. The institutions that can provide the necessary linkage were identified and they include town unions, age grades, community development committee and community-based organizations.

The main thrust of the paper was on the forms or level of government-community participation or cooperation community development projects. Four forms were identified and they indicate that citizen participation can be at the decision making level; at the stage of project or service implementation, in the evaluation of project administrators or quality of service and in control over how project is directed in the long run. It was our contention that since problems management involves a series of activities, all the four forms of cooperation should be incorporated. The possible constraints to effective government community participation in community development community projects were also highlighted. In the final analysis we discovered government community participation in community development projects or programmes is indispensable for any meaningful development to occur in any community.

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