

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT COUNCIL IN COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF IMO STATE

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Abstract

This work critically investigated the people's perception on the role of Community Government Council (CGC) in community participation and development in rural communities in Imo State. The main objectives of this work are to ascertain the extent the CGC has contributed to development in rural communities in Imo State, the extent the CGC has contributed to community participation in rural communities in Imo State and the factors undermining the operation of CGC community participation and development in Imo State. This study used primary source like questionnaire instrument to collect data from the respondents. The mean score with four point likert scale and simple percentage statistical method were used to analyze the data collected. Based on the analysis, it was discovered that the activities of CGC have not adequately contributed towards enhancing community participation and development in rural communities in Imo State. And, certain factors like poor funding, poor staff, excessive state government control, corruption and desire to acquire political power, etc undermined the operation of CGC in Imo State. This work recommended provision of adequate funding, strengthening of local government system, more encouragement of mass participation than reliance on public bureaucracy, reintroduction and encouragement of Town Unions and other community based organization, etc.

Keywords: Community Government Council (CGC), Community Participation, Development, Rural Communities.

Introduction

At the dawn of the 21st Century, calls for more active engagement of poor people in development have come of age. Participation in development has gained a new respectability and legitimacy and with the status of development orthodoxy (Cornwell cited in Mohan, 2008).

The achievement of national development depends on the development at the grassroots and rural communities. And to ensure a sustainable grass root development requires effective participation / involvement of the people. In recent time, it is generally assumed that development cannot be visible without the active participation of the people. This is because "through people / citizen participation, a large section of the community is encouraged to identify and articulate their own goals, design their own methods of change

and pool their resources in the problem-solving process.” (Harrison, 1995 as cited in Understanding Community Participation, n.d).

Community participation is highly relevant for certain reasons: first to ensure accountability and transparency, increase local self-reliance, ensures development that reflect people needs and preference, ensure a sense of belonging, responsibility and people’s support for planning, execution and evaluation of development projects. (Onyishi, 2011; Idode, 1989 & Desai, 2008). The decades of development funding has demonstrated the failures of top-down approach to development, making most projects to suffer from lack of sustainability. And this can be accounted for lack of local participation (Khwaja, 2004).

The need to ensure sustainable development at grass root level in Nigeria, necessitates the local government reforms of 1976 that recognized the Local government as the third tier of Nigeria federal state with the intention to make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives, facilitates democratic self-government, mobilize both human and material resources through people involvement and provision of two-way communication between local community and government (Ogunna, 1996, p.3). However, the inability of the Local Governments to achieve their functions led to the call for strategizing how to ensure sustainable development in rural communities.

In Imo State, the Okorochoa’s administration introduced the fourth-tier Government known as the Community Government Council (CGC) with the intention to bring government closer to the people, ensure active involvement / participation of the people, ensure sustainable development, transparency and accountability, employment opportunities and preservation of culture in the various communities in Imo State.

The Community Government Council comprises Town Union President-General, Community Speaker, Women Leader and Youth Leader. The CGC is headed by a traditional ruler, while the women leader, youth leader and President-General play an advisory role. And the execution of policies and disbursement of fund is carried out by the civil servants.

Therefore, this research work is set to critically assess the peoples’ perception on the role of the Community Government Council (CGC) towards achieving community participation and development in rural communities in Imo State.

Problem Statement

Despite government efforts to achieve grass roots development and transformation; there is still presence of high rate of poverty, low standard of living, poor health and educational services, poor infrastructures etc, which undermined the general well-being of the people at the grass roots and rural communities in Nigeria.

Based on this, this research raised a question: how does the activity of Community Government Council (CGC) affect community participation and development in rural communities in Imo State? This serves as the problem focus.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this work is to critically assess the people’s perception on the activities of Community Government Council (CGC) towards achieving community participation and development in rural communities in Imo State. The specific objectives are:

- i. To ascertain the people’s perception on the extent Community Government Council (CGC) has contributed to community participation in rural communities in Imo State.
- ii. To ascertain the people’s perception on the extent Community Government Council (CGC) has contributed to development in rural communities in Imo State.
- iii. To identify the factors undermining the activities of CGC towards achieving community participation and development in Imo State.

iv. To proffer adequate solution on how to enhance community participation and sustainable development in rural communities in Imo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions of this work include:

1. To what are the people's perception on the extent Community Government Council (CGC) contributed to community participation in rural communities in Imo State?
2. To what are the people's perception on the extent Community Government Council (CGC) contributed to development in rural communities in Imo State?
3. What are the factors that posed as impediment to the operations of Community Government Council (CGC) towards achieving community participation and development in Imo State?
4. What are the suitable ways to enhance community participation and sustainable development in rural communities in Imo State?

Conceptualization / Operationalization of Concepts

i. Community: The word community does not have a precise meaning. Community can be a form of communities of place or communities of interest. The former implies or emphasizes on geographical location or boundaries, while the later looked at communities in terms of having a common interest and identity without necessarily looking at geography (Smits, 2012). Egwuogu (2013) defined community as "a sense of cultural affinity and or oneness shared by a distinct anthropologically determinate group who owe their origin to a common progenitor and who may not be domiciled in an identifiable territorial social-cultural ecosystem and share a commonality of interest in the survival of the said community." MacQueen, et al (2001 as cited in Smits, 2012) sees community as a "group of people with diverse characteristics, who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings."

Ogunna (2007) defined community as "a group of people that share common geographical location, common cultural traits and traditional affinity which is normally a village or village group."

So, for the relevance of this work, the Ogunna's definition of community is used as a working definition of this work. Therefore, this work focuses on community of geographical location. That is, people living on a particular geographical location that have the same culture, traditions, norms and values.

ii. Rural: In this work, we define rural as the geographical area that is located outside cities. And this area is not developed like that of the city mainly in terms of basic amenities of life. It means all the population, housing and areas that are not regarded as urban areas.

iii. Rural community: This simply means the community that involve group of people that live outside cities and not included as urban area.

iv. Participation: The World Bank Learning Group on Participatory Development (1995 as cited in Understanding Community Participation, 2015) defined participation as "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them." United Nations Report (1979 as cited in Desai, 2008) sees participation as "sharing by people in the benefits of development, active contribution by people to development and involvement of people in decision making at all levels of society."

In this work, we define participation as the involvement or organized effort of people in the planning, execution and evaluation of development projects in an area or society.

v. Community participation: Oakley and Marsden (1987 as cited in Izueke, 2011) defined community participation as “the process by which individuals, families or communities assume responsibility for their own welfare and develop a capacity to contribute to their own and the community development. In the context of development, community participation refers to an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely received a share of project benefits (Bamberger, 1986 as cited in Izueke, 2012).

In this work we see community participation as the involvement or organized effort of people in some geographical location (community) towards the planning, policy making and execution of development projects for the well-being of the community.

vi. Development: This means the improvement in quality of life of the people in a society. Here, we focused on improvement in agriculture, roads, primary education and health care.

Theoretical Framework

This work will adopt a theoretical framework known as structural functional theory/ approach.

Structural Functional theory/ approach

This theory/ approach was developed by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown in social Anthropology while Talcott Parsons gave it the sophistication of a theoretical framework in sociology. Structural functional approach came into political science by Gabriel Almond in the 1960's by using the system concepts (Ekwonna, 2014 and Unanka, 2004). Almond focused on identification of functions of the polity in modern western system and how these functions are performed in non-western systems in the process of modernization (Unanka, 2004).

This Theory / approach holds that all the system in a society have structures or institutions and these structures or institutions have functions to perform for the survival of the society. Therefore, all political systems have structures which they must perform certain task in order to achieve equilibrium. According to Ekwonna (2014) “the objective concern of structural functionalism is to identify which structures constitute which system, which structures perform which functions, and which functions impact on the system as a result of the relationship it creates with the structure and the rest of the structures in the system.”

The basic assumptions of this theory / approach include:

1. All system has structures which can be identified and these structures have certain functions to perform.
2. The broad aims and principles underlying a social structure can be identified
3. There is an interconnection between the parts of the society and tensions are resolved by the parts working together.
4. The society serves as a single interconnected system where each structure performs certain functions and interact with each other to achieve maintenance of equilibrium (Sharma 1984 and Johari 1983 cited in Ekwonna, 2014).

The relevance of this theory to this work is to guide us to explain the activities of CGC as a structure in Imo State political system towards the development and maintenance of survival of the communities in Imo State. The community government council is seen as a sub structure in Imo State political system with the aim to achieve development, ensure community participation and preservation of cultural values. And the failure of CGC to perform its function will automatically undermine the survival of the Imo State political system.

Review of Related Literature

Here, this work set to review some literature done by some scholars.

Ugwoke and Ugwuanyi (2014) investigated the community participation in the administration of secondary schools in Nsukka education zone. They discovered and argued that the community adequately participated in provision of funds for building of structures of secondary schools while in aspect in decision making, the members of the community are not allowed to be involved in decision making process on secondary school administration in Nsukka education zone. They suggested that for urgent need for the National Policy of education to spell out areas which communities can be involved in decision making, increase in sensitization for community participation.

Wedam, Quansah and Debrah (2015) examined role of community participation on Educational Infrastructure Development and Management in Ghana. They revealed that there is a direct linkage between community and increase in school enrolment; access and utilization of educational infrastructure. Also the quality and nature of educational infrastructure provided by the communities were lamentable in most cases. They further recommended for continuous education and sanitization and critical assessment of stakeholder power.

Hoddinott, Adato, Besley and Haddad (2001) critically looked at the role of participation and poverty reduction in South Africa. They suggested that as far as the communities have the advantage of information than outsiders that community participation offers the prospect of lowering the cost of anti-poverty interventions. They discovered that increase in community participation reduces the ratio of project to local wages, increase the labour intensity of projects and lowers the cost of creating employment and of transferring funds to poor individuals.

Khwaja (2004) investigated the impact of community participation on outcomes of development projects in Northern Pakistan and asserts that community participation is not always desirable for development, because community participation improves project outcomes in non-technical decision, while community participation in technical decision highly undermine project outcomes in Northern Pakistan. He maintained that there is need to understand and recognize both benefits and limitations of community participation.

Similarly, Popoola (2013) examined the essence of Community Based Organizations (CBO) participation in governance for facilitating and fast-tracking socio-economic development and ensuring accountability and responsiveness among government functionaries. He maintained that participation of CBOs in governance could lead to effective representation and empowerment which would in turn enhance democratic dividends and development in the grass roots.

Another study, done by Emenalo and Ibekwe (2013) critically assess community involvement in secondary schools development in Okigwe Education Zone of Imo State. They revealed that the communities actively get involved in the development of secondary school through donations, of lands and money, construction of buildings, provision of facilities. They further discovered that community does not participate effectively in terms of monetary utilization of funds. They suggested for good school community relationship strategies and involvement in monitoring of projects.

Desai (2008) who looked at community participation for development argued that even though the idea of community participation is relevant for development, there have been lack of political will to encourage full participation of people and having limited view of participation are often co-opted by and serve the interest of the high income groups at the detriment of the poor. He maintained that participatory programme have brought a huge benefits to the people in many parts of the world but experience many difficulties. He further asserts that the limit of participation need to be recognized and accommodated and new

management skills need to be developed and more flexible planning tools devised to encourage community participation.

In aspect of development, Ozor and Nwankwo (2008) studied the role of local leaders in community development programme in Ideato LGA. They revealed that the most important role played by local leaders in community development are decision making, liaison between government and non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation of projects. They further maintained that issue of gender bias, incompatibility of government policies with community programmes, insufficient funds, poor implementation of programmes adversely affect the community development. And the suggested for urgent need for extension policy that will formally accommodate the local leaders in all community development initiatives of both governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Onyenechere (2010) appraise the rural development programme in Imo State. He discovered that there are existence of multifarious agencies or programmes in the state to reduce poverty but these programmes or agencies have not adequately tackle the problem of poverty at the rural areas because there is no adequate scheme for the improvement of life of people in most of the communities. He further discovered that the problem of corruption, bad governance is the greatest factors perceived by the people as be setting from poverty reduction schemes. He recommended for adequate monitoring and empowerment of intermediating field workers, encouragement of self help project and application of tripartite participation in poverty education.

Onyishi (2011) posited that for genuine grass roots participation in development processes to be secured, there is need for commitment by the local, state and federal levels to push the frontier of democratic practice beyond the rather ritual boundaries set by periodic institutional reforms to encourage participation in the grass roots. Ugwu (2011) looked at the Government Community Cooperation on project and rural development and concludes that involvement of communities in managing project to great extent monize waste and prevent hasty commissioning of projects, promote better understanding and cooperation and achieve effective monitoring and evaluation of projects. He further discovered that the challenges which the government face in project management for rural development include problem of finance, information, poor consultation with the community leaders, personal interest of officials, problems of appropriate utilization of Programme Evaluation and Review Techniques (PERT).

Iheriohanma, Wokoma and Nwokorie (2014) looked at the issue of leadership question and the challenges of community development in Nigeria. They identified several challenges that have impinged on the efforts of leadership towards transforming the rural communities despite the abundant human and material resources which include the problem of purposeful, critical and knowledgeable leadership, lack of rule of law, absence of accountability and transparency, corruption, electoral malpractices etc. They recommended for leaders should be transparent and accountable and the need to ensure re-examination of the internal and external factors militating against rural transformation. This means that for rural communities to achieve sustainable development, effective leadership is highly necessary.

In aspect of financing community development, Ukpongson, Chikaire, Nwakwasi, Ejiogu-Okereke and Emeona (2011) examined the problem of financing community development projects in Obowo Local Government Area of Imo State. They observed concluded that embezzlement, mismanagement, poor security at the project site, cost of compensation for land owners serve a major challenge during financing/ execution of the projects. This implies that community participation is not only needed to achieve community development rather adequate finance is needed.

Idode (1989) looked at the Bureaucracy and rural development in Nigeria. He maintained that to ensure sustainable development cannot be solely on strengthening of the administrative reforms and strengthening of public bureaucracy alone, will not enhance rural income, equitable distribution of the output of the economy and improvement in rural life. Rather with the right political leadership, the public bureaucracy should be directed towards providing technical/ administrative support needed for effective rural development. He further recommended for shift in emphasis from urban to rural development and national ideology for mobilization of mass participation in the planning and execution of rural development projects.

Umeh (2013) examined the fourth tier system of government in Imo State, he asserted that the clamour for the fourth tier system would not have risen if the third tier system is adequately performing its functions and delivery the needed development in the rural areas. He further maintained that the idea of fourth tier system will continue to be resisted by the people because any new introduction will lead to depletion of available resources and further alienation of the people. He suggested for adequate restructuring and strengthens of the Local Government to perform its function for rural development.

Having taken time to review some of the works by some scholars this work will now focus on the perception of the people on the role of CGC in achieving community participation and development in rural communities in Imo State. This is the research gap of the study.

Methodology

This work adopted survey design which focused on collecting data from sample of individuals. And these respondents would serve as the representation of the total population. The population of this work consists of the total number of adult male and female in rural communities in Imo State. This research used 300 sample size which will act as the representation of the total population. In sampling techniques, this work adopted non-probability sampling techniques by specifically using purposive or judgmental sampling.

This work used both primary and secondary sources. The primary source includes questionnaire instrument to get the perception of the people in the rural communities. The secondary sources include use of journals, textbooks, abstracts. This work adopted the mean score with the use of four point likert scale to analyze the responses of the respondents.

Data presentation and Analysis

Here, we intend to present and analyze the data collected from the responses of respondents. 500 questionnaires were distributed to respondents in selected rural communities in Imo State. This work used the mean and four point likert score of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD) and rated 4,3,2 and 1 points. And the simple percentage method was also adopted.

Table 1: Showing the mean rating of the extent of which CGC has contributed to development in rural communities.

S/N	Questionnaire	Responses				Total		Decisions
		SA	A	D	SD	Score	Mean	
1	The CGC has adequately contributed to agricultural development in your area	86 (344)	68 (204)	186 (372)	118 (118)	644	1.40	Rejected
2	The CGC has adequately contributed towards attracting infrastructural development in your area	4 (16)	121 (363)	235 (470)	98 (98)	947	2.06	Rejected

3	CGC has adequately contributed in improvement of primary health centre in your community	10 (40)	143 (429)	203 (406)	102 (102)	977	2.13	Rejected
4	The CGC has adequately contributed towards the maintenance of local roads in your area	11 (44)	46 (138)	291 (582)	110 (110)	874	1.90	Rejected
5	The CGC has adequately contributed towards maintenance of primary schools	55 (220)	182 (546)	169 (338)	52 (52)	1156	2.52	Accepted
6	Generally the CGC has adequately contributed towards achieving development in your area	2 (8)	12 (36)	251 (502)	66 (66)	612	1.33	Rejected
		Grand Mean =				1.89		Rejected

Source: Field data, 2015

From the table above, it indicates that the mean score of question item 1 to 6 are 1.40, 2.06, 2.13, 1.90, 2.52 and 1.33 respectively and the grand mean score is 1.89. It shows that the CGC has not adequately contributed to agricultural development, attraction of infrastructure, improvement in health centres, maintenance of local roads and general development of the communities. And that the CGC only contributed adequately in maintenance of primary school.

Therefore, it shows that the CGC has not adequately contributed to the development of rural communities in Imo State.

Table 2: Showing the mean rating of the extent of which the CGC has contributed to community participation

S/N	Questionnaire	Responses				Total		Decision
		SA	A	D	SD	Score	Mean	
1	The CGC has adequately brought people together to achieve a common goal in your community	86 (344)	52 (156)	189 (378)	131 (131)	1009	2.20	Rejected
2	The CGC has played a vital role in encouraging people's involvement in making decision for the development of their area	91 (364)	77 (231)	223 (446)	67 (67)	1108	2.41	Rejected
3	The CGC has been able to increase people's involvement/ participation in execution of developmental projects in your community	39 (156)	141 (423)	208 (416)	70 (70)	1065	2.32	Rejected
		Grand Mean =				2.31		Rejected

Source: Field data, 2015

From the table above, it indicates that the mean score of the question item 1 to 3 are 2.20, 2.41, 2.32 respectively and the grand mean score is 2.31. In addition, it shows that the CGC has not played a vital role in encouraging people involvement in decision making and execution of projects.

Therefore, the results from the above table show that the CGC has not adequately contributed to community participation in rural communities in Imo State.

Question: Identify the challenges undermining the operation of Community Government Council (CGC) in your area?

Here, we use an open ended question. Based on the responses on the above questions, it was discovered that the respondents identified those factors that are hindering the activities of CGC in Imo State as follows:

1. Lack of cooperation between the CGC and the people and among the people in the community
2. Corruption
3. Poor funding
4. Poor enlightenment on the need for community participation
5. Inadequate staff
6. Poor policy implementation
7. Excessive state government control
8. Poor communication between the CGC and the communities.
9. Increase in authoritarian nature of traditional rulers.
10. Poor selection of candidates.
11. Structural design

Discussion of findings

Based on the analysis, this work made the following findings:

This work discovered that the activities of Community Government Council have not adequately contributed to the development of rural communities in Imo State. Therefore, the CGC has not yet played a significant role in ensuring development. In table 1, it shows that apart from contribution on education, the CGC has not played a significant role towards the improvement of agriculture, local roads, health and other infrastructures which have adversely affected the living standard or general well being of the people in rural communities.

This research also revealed that the operation of CGC has not adequately contributed towards community participation in rural communities in Imo State. The results in table 2 indicated that there is low participation of people in the decision and execution of developmental projects in rural communities in Imo State.

This work discovered that factors like poor funding; excessive state government control, lack of cooperation, corruption, poor policy implementation, poor enlightenment etc undermined the operation of CGC towards ensuring community participation and sustainable development in rural communities in Imo State. In addition, there is a widespread perception that poor funding is the number one factor (major factor) that undermines the operation of CGC for development in rural areas.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. If the government still insist to allow the CGC to exist, there is need to provide adequate funding so that the CGC can adequately perform its stipulated functions. The CGC cannot be able to engender community participation and development without enough funds.
2. In a situation where the state government cannot fund the CGC, there is an urgent need to abolish the CGC and focus on strengthening the local government by giving its substantial autonomy to discharge its function for the development of local communities. If the Local Governments are not strengthen, there is no how the CGC will succeed.

3. There is need to restate or strengthening the activities of town unions and other community organized groups (organization). This will make it very easier for both the government and community to provide resources (both human and material) towards the planning, execution and evaluation of development projects or programmes etc.
4. The government should focus more on mass participation rather than relying on too much bureaucracy. This is because administrative reforms or strengthening of the capability of public bureaucracy or governmental structure/ institution is not enough to bring development to rural areas. The government should rely more on people participation by encouraging the growth of community based organizations in local communities. However, the public bureaucracy can be allowed only in aspect of providing technical and administrative assistance / support for actualization of sustainable development.
5. There is need to reduce or avoid unnecessary government control or interference. Without much interference, the community organizations or CGC as the case may be can effectively discharge its duties effectively.
6. There is need to ensure that the process of engendering community participation is based on development oriented rather than more emphasis on political reasons or acquiring of political powers. Therefore, emphasis on community participation for political solution or reasons will automatically undermine development leading towards serving the interest of the few political masters than those of the poor.

Conclusion

The formation of Community Government Council in Imo State shows that the Okorocho's Administration has the desire to bring government and development at the door step of the people. And to achieve this, requires people's participation. However, it has shown that despite the plan and good intention of establishment of CGC, there has been a widespread perception that the CGC has not yet played a significant role in bringing development and increasing community participation in rural communities in the state. The assumed failure of CGC can be as a result of the poor funding, structural design, excessive state government control, corruption, lack of people cooperation etc.

For the Imo State government to ensure adequate community participation for developmental projects and programmes and achieve sustainable development, there must be adequate efforts to fashion out appropriate strategies or means not only to bring government closer to the people (through ensuring proper community participation), also to adequately improve the living standard of the people (development) in the rural communities in Imo State.

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