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**COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION
PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Community leadership participation, engagement and intervention in promoting community development is a critical phenomenon in any community. Community development entails the implementation of policies and programmes which will have far-reaching effect on the individuals, communities or societies and enhance sustainable community development and well-being of the citizens. The purpose of this paper was to examine the community leadership roles in development sustainability in the rural areas. It provided a broad overview of community leadership participation and engagement in development and community leadership intervention programmes for community sustainable development and people's wellbeing. Findings reveal that inclusiveness of community leaders in community development programmes will not only inspire mobilization of citizens, completion of projects but also will serve as link between the governments, federal, state and local levels. It discovered that community leadership will reduce gender inequality, and bias, enhance sustainable development because they will be involved in policy design, plan, implementation, execution and assessment. As community stakeholder, community leaders' intervention in development programmes will transform economic growth and reduce project abandonment. Therefore, the study concludes that for sustainable development to occur in any community, the spokespersons (community leaders) should be in the community's, development plans.

Keywords: Leader, Community Leadership, Participation, Intervention Programmes.

Introduction

Community project abandonment has taken the centre stage of our society in the recent times. This is as a result of un-inclusiveness of the people and mostly the community leaders who are grassroots mobilizers of members of the community. Leadership could be seen as a process consisting of transactions between the leader and the followers in which case an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. It is in this instance that Ogunmilade, Nwoko and Akhigbe (2017) believe that leadership is a process through which one individual consistently exerts more influence than others in the pursuit of group behavior and activities. It is the capacity in a person or in a group of persons to inspire confidence and thereby regard for himself or themselves to guide and govern the followers in order to achieve a set developmental

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goal. Therefore, community leadership is the ability to mobilize, sensitize, galvanize and set a workable agenda for the community wellbeing, (Okaneme, 2017). Community leadership becomes crucial because it will enhance community development and generate confidence which will propel community participation and enthusiasm.

A community can only be developed when the leadership engages all the citizens towards set objectives. Engagement presupposes all-inclusiveness of the entire community citizens irrespective of class, gender, age or financial status. Therefore, a community can only exist based on the united efforts of its members (Onyido & Inemesit, 2021). They further stated that leadership is a channel through which the characteristics to improve the community capacity flows. For sustainable community development to thrive, there must be effective leadership in the community. The people must work side by side with their leaders. Leadership is a driving force which facilitates development and the daily activities of the community members.

In their own perception, Okafor and Onukwu (2022) believe that development is not a largess or gift from an individual or a philanthropic person to the community. It involves systematic inclusion of community members equated with scientific and technical knowledge to meet specific objectives and requirements. Development is directed towards adding improvements to material lives of the citizens and the society. A community is made up of leaders and followers and development could not occur without the active involvement, engagement and participation of all the community members (Okafor & Onukwu, 2022). Obeta and Charity as cited in Okafor and Onukwu (2022) opt that sustained engagement, participation and sustained interest could only be achieved through developmental efforts of the leaders and the followers with the people's social, cultural, and religious values devoid of gender inequality and bias. Hamdil, (2017) in his contribution sees community development participation and engagement as a process by which professionals, families, community group, government officials and others get together to work something out preferably in a formal or non- formal partnership. Therefore, for a genuine development to occur in any community, citizens must be involved either to enhance development or to sustain it. Inclusiveness becomes critical in a community that wants development. It is the utmost nature of man to improve development that Okafor and Onukwu (2022) citing Emeh, Eluwa and Uka consider people's engagement and participation to be critical in achieving the objectives of development. The emphasis therefore, among other things is that participation and engagement by individual beneficiaries (leaders and followers) is an indispensable feature of all forms of development. It is in this premise therefore that this paper advocates that leadership participation and intervention in community development should include and involve all segments of the community citizens because it is they that determine what constitutes development.

Community Leadership Roles in Development

Development is a multidimensional process which involves sustained elevation of the entire community or society and social system towards better or humane life. Uzoagu (2019) is of the opinion that a community leader must guide his people and himself be guided by the understanding that community development has the principal purpose of bringing about desirable better changes for better living. The leader must endeavor to lead his people to identify the problems inhibiting their progress as community and should lead them to be prepared to solve

them. With his effort, the people will appreciate the fact that sustainable community development can be achieved when they willingly cooperate to achieve set goals, (Uzoagu, 2019). Nwakaire (2016) believes that community development as applied in the third world especially the rural communities is directed towards increasing the material standard of the poor at the grassroots level which can be ascertained through increased food, real income, education, health care amongst others. In these circumstances, community leaders must be equipped and able to meet the challenges, aspirations and needs of the people within the community. Therefore, community leadership is that which involves influence, power, and input into public decision-making over one or more spheres of activities (Onyido & Inemesit, 2021). They further argued that community leadership is synonymous with community power structure. The power structure is the complex network of relationship between the recognized power holders (leaders) on the interplays of their roles in a community.

Therefore, there are four basic roles expected of a leader in Onyebamiji and Adekola as cited in Onyido and Inemesit (2021:3). These include:

- ❖ The leader is the group's spokesperson.
- ❖ The leader is a group harmonizer and an enabler
- ❖ The leader is a symbol of group ideals and an agent of control.
- ❖ The leader is a group of educators or an expert.

While community leaders play these very important basic roles in their communities, they must also involve the community citizens in other to achieve group goals and aspirations. This is because the citizens play major roles in determining what constitute their felt needs.

Therefore, community leaders to be effective in achieving, both basis and major roles, they must be trustworthy, fair to all opinions, democratize in decision-making, all-inclusiveness, and devoid of gender inequality amongst others. For Kobani and Alozie, (2015) leadership is a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the support of others in the accomplishment of a common goal. In this circumstance, Cherry (2015) infers that a leader must possess exemplary qualities which will enable him challenge the process in order to identify its developmental benefits to the community. A leader should be able to guide the community to identify a felt-need while not suppressing other opinions but guiding the citizens to a better choice. A good community leader should always lead the way through mobilization, conscientization, sensitization, engagement and participation. This is why Obama (2016) believes that leadership is showing the way and helping or inducing others to pursue it. He further stated that leadership entails envisioning a desirable future, promoting a clear purpose or mission, supportive values and intelligent strategies, and empowering and engaging all those concerned. This is why community leadership must be an all-inclusive to enable the citizens to participate effectively towards the development of their communities.

Community Leadership Participation in Development

The term participation as conceived by Cohen and Uphost in Esefieni (2020) states that engagement or participation means the involvement of a significant number of persons in situation or action which enhance their wellbeing. Turutein (2010) in Okafor and Onukwu (2022) posits participation as the active process in which a people in question takes part in the initiative and implementation of decision. Community participation is an active process according to Esuefieni,

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(2020) where beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receive a share of project benefits. Leadership is the mechanism in which participation and community development hinge. Community leaders are the ones to approve, mobilize, sensitize and champion community development. In this vein, the citizens are engaged; motivated to take the initiative according to their felt needs which will facilitate the achievement and development of their common goals.

However, Kuponyi (2008) in Onyido and Inemesit (2021) states that the actual participation and engagement of the leaders in the execution of the projects could be a strong indicator for the participation of the citizens. The first major requirement for successful project(s) in any community is to enlist the support and blessings of the leaders of that community. This is because the community members could only be motivated when their leaders are vanguard of community development and citizens wellbeing. An effective community leader must imbibe the principles of felt need, self-help and citizen participation and engagement (Kobani, 2015).

As mobilizers, community leaders are important stakeholder groups for achieving an all-inclusive development in any community. It is on this premise that Adirika (2013) in Okafor and Onukwu (2022) believes that the wheel of development of any nation or community lies on the shoulder of their leaders. This is because the action or inaction of such leaders is critical to development. Therefore, their developmental participation and engagement cannot be underrated. The community leaders' full participation and engagement is essential to achieving people-centred and integrated sustainable development of a community (Okafor & Onukwu, 2022). They infer that people so affected by any development must be active doers, not passive recipients of development. This is one of the reasons why development cannot be delivered to people because it must come within in order to transform their living condition. In this circumstance therefore, Don and kutzmark (2016) looked at community development as a participatory, holistic and all-inclusive process that leads to positive concrete changes in communities by creating employment, reducing poverty, restoring the health of natural environment, stabilizing local economies and increasing community control. In his own contribution, Esuefieni (2020) opts that if there is no participation or engagement there is hardly any development. Therefore, participation becomes the chain that draws citizens close to development programmes and also enhances their wellbeing and community development transformation.

It is in agreement with utilitarian values of participation and engagement that Okafor and Onukwu (2022) referencing Abiona and Imihabekhai are of the view that the principle of citizen participation and engagement (including community leaders) are the hub of all other developmental indices, thus, without gender, status or social bias. Development therefore is people's partnership with those able to assist them identify their needs and increasingly assume the responsibility to plan, manage, control, and assess the collective action that are necessary for development to occur. Community leaders' involvement, participation, engagement and all inclusion promote development in any community. It is paramount that community leaders must realize the need to carry along community members in order to achieve the set objectives unhindered.

Community Leadership Intervention Programmes

Intervention as stated in Okafor and Onukwu (2022) is an act of making things better by involving hitherto excluded group of people. They further submit that it could also be seen as admission of person or persons not originally in the seen to prevent duplication. Community leaders should possess the greatest knowledge, understanding of their people's needs and aspirations and have the agility, creativity and energy to propel motivation and so achieve development. It is in this vein that Coonrod in Okafor and Onukwu (2022) insists that community leadership intervention in programmes design and delivery can drive innovation, increase retention of programmes participants, lead to longer-lasting programme outcomes, and positively impact in development. In this direction, community leaders should be seen as motivators of community development, progress and unity of purpose. Community leadership intervention and involvement in any development programme requires sufficient support, opportunities and services to ensure that community leaders participate meaningfully and equitably in decision-making process and therefore play an enhanced leadership role. They should act as drivers of community development and progress. Their power, vision, commitment and zeal to achieve success cannot be overemphasized, rather should be harness, tapped, mobilized and encouraged for sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in their communities. They should be involved and integrated in development structures which have variety of benefits, and will promote development within the concept of inclusiveness, equality, devoid of gender disparity, culture and community oneness and wellbeing.

Leadership has been identified as an important function towards achieving the aims and objectives of a group (community or society). Owolabi (2012) cited in Iheriohanma, Wokoma and Nwokorie (2014) describe leadership as an "essential oil that keeps the wheel of government working without any difficulty". It involves giving direction, mobilizing, sensitizing and coordinating citizens who are critical assets of the community. This is why Northhouse (2004) still believe that leadership is a process that influences a group of individuals towards achieving a common goal. Warri and Deekor (2020) aptly captured leadership as the person who creates the most effective change in group performance and as a process of influencing, directing and coordinating the activities of other people in an organization (community) towards the advancement of the goals of the community, society or organization.

In another development Uzoagu (2019) affirmed that leadership is a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. She concluded that a leader is simply somebody whom people follow or somebody who guides or directs others. Jacob and Jacques in Oboma (2016) state that leadership is a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve collective purpose. Leadership has to do with the ability of the leaders to show the right path to the group or people he leads in other for them to go the way he wants them to go. Therefore, community leadership intervention becomes inevitable as they (leaders) are the ones who will influence and inspire community citizens towards achieving group goals or community felt needs.

The intervention of community leaders in community development process will enhance strategic rural infrastructure, reduce public expenditure patterns and improve majority participation of community members. It will generate developmental confidence and link to both federal, state and local levels and donor agencies to facilitate the requisite partnership for the transformation of the life of the rural community dwellers to come to fruition. The integration,

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participation and intervention of community leaders will enhance community development efforts, identify, improve and provide incentives for rural employment, job creation, wealth generation and thereafter rural economic production will be meaningful achieved. Proper involvement, intervention and integrated bio-social development of community leaders, a nation can achieve her human and economic development set to be accomplished.

Conclusion

Development has been identified as an important effort aimed at improving the lots of rural dwellers in Nigeria. Therefore, it is inevitable involving, engaging, integrating and improving rural economic environment to enhance development without the intervention, participation and engagement of the community leaders. Sustainable community development will mean that the leadership should take the front line and tackle many of the problems which engender under-development. In other to achieve these and maintain development, community leaders must partake in decision making, planning, implementation and evaluation of projects and programmes that affect their communities and narrowed towards development. Since community leadership participation, engagement and involvement propel development, their intervention will promote sustainable development of a community. Therefore, it is imperative that for development to occur, community leaders must be totally incorporated and integrated in the affairs of the community.

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