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Improving Quality of Life through Community-Based Participatory Development in Nigeria: Explanatory factors for success and failure

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Abstract

Experiences in the application of the community-based model as a strategy for improving the quality of life of poor communities have reported improvement in terms of project performance. However, it has been observed that most studies placed emphasis on the overall performance determined at the aggregate level. For this reason, the findings, do not allow for an adequate expression of the variation in the success or failure stories of the projects and the explanatory factors for them. This article investigates the explanatory factors that account for variation in success and failure of a Community-based development initiative in Kebbi-state, Nigeria, using a case study approach.

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Keywords: Community-based strategy; social service delivery; quality of life; Nigeria

1. Introduction

The idea of participatory development approach stems from the realization that government efforts towards meeting the developmental needs of the people have not been totally effective (Yeung & McGee, 1986). The period

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of the economic recession experienced in the early 1980s has reduced the capacity of many governments to provide infrastructures and services. The inefficiency of the public sector makes it difficult for many governments to match demand with an adequate provision (Adeogun & Taiwo 2011). The poor performance of the public sector has prompted the adoption of participatory strategies in order to improve the quality of life of the citizens. The strategies come in different patterns like self-help, cooperative, self-sustaining and community-based. The strategies are termed participatory due to people's participation and organization.

Many evaluation studies (Kapopo 1993; Mumtaz 2001; Mansuri & Rao 2004) have reported improvements and successes with the adoption of the community-based participatory development strategy. However, as valuable as they are, those studies have been criticized due to their emphasis on overall program performance. That is; areas of poor performance are mostly not separated from those of good performance especially where the aggregate performance is adjudged to be good. This article focuses on investigating the explanatory factors that account for variation in success and failure of a community-based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP) in Kebbi state, Nigeria.

The article discusses the concept of participatory development and its application towards improving the Quality of Life (QoL) of poor communities through an extensive review of the literature. It then investigates, using a case study approach, the explanatory factors that account for variation in success and failure of a Community-based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP) in Nigeria. The contribution of this research is in filling the gap created by previous studies that favor the aggregate assessments. The understanding of the explanatory factors will influence policy formulation and development of community-based projects towards uplifting the living standards of poor communities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Concept of participatory development

The concept of participatory development is intertwined with the concepts of community development, community-based organizations, and empowerment (Schirin, 2010). Community development is a deliberate effort to improve the lives of the citizens. As submitted by Ngiri (2012), consequently, they are increasingly becoming a key target group for implementing development projects at the local level.

Many researchers view participatory development as a “means” rather than an aim in itself. Participatory development is a tool for development and empowerment (Jamaludin, Othman, & Awang, 2012; Shubeler, 1996), and improving efficiency (Slaymaker, Christiansen, & Hemming, 2005). People obtain a greater voice in the allocation and use of resources through participatory development. Critics like Mosse (2001) questioned the extent to which participation addresses such complex issues as empowerment. However, proponents like Xu (2007) and Schirin (2010) maintained that community members can gain more local control and greater influence through participatory development programs.

The participatory development strategy differs from the service delivery approach (government-provided) in which the government agency is the “benefactor” and the community the “recipient”. The participatory approach strengthens the role of the community by involving them in the planning and implementation of development projects for the community. According to Ondrik (1999), beneficiaries of development projects contribute significantly to planning, operation, and maintenance of such projects. The impact of participatory development programs extends beyond service improvement. It also includes enhancing the capacity of citizens to manage local affairs and interact more efficiently with the authorities. Participatory development also increases user ownership of projects and ensures self-sustenance and better maintenance (Ibem, 2009; Laurens, 2012).

2.2. Factors influencing the success of participatory development projects

Many factors affect the performance of participatory development schemes. These include targeting the schemes to the perceived needs of the beneficiaries (Hermann, 2007). Participatory development projects should provide demand-oriented services and development that address the real needs of the people concerned.

Other factors include adequate resources (Mwaura & Ngugi, 2014) and community capacity (Muhammed, 2008) to support development projects. In a study on community-based rural development projects in Kenya, Ngiri (2012)

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