Sustainable Grassroots Development: A major challenge of Globalization

Salihu Danlami Musa, (PhD)
The Humanities and Globalization
The African Perspective

Edited by
A. D. Menegbe
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Sustainable Grassroot Development: A Major Challenge of Globalization

Musa, S. D.

Introduction

The improvement of the quality of life of our people has been a major concern of government the world over particularly in Nigeria. The various governments are not alone in these efforts towards improved living condition of the Nigerian people other bodies-like governmental and Non-governmental organizations, for example the United Nations, International Monetary Funds (IMF), European Union (EU) World Bank, etc, have been working concertedly, with the government in the developmental efforts in Nigeria. Several policies have been formulated and adopted and numerous projects aimed at improving the general well-being of the people have been initiated. Despite these efforts, it is rather unfortunate that poverty, hunger and hardship have pervaded our communities particularly the rural areas. Many of the rural communities in the country today cannot boast of basic necessities of life like education, medical facilities, housing, portable water supply, electricity, good roads and so on.

Faced with this scenario, one begins to wonder why the efforts put into the developmental needs of the communities have not yielded commensurate results. Why do we have so many abandoned projects all over the place? In short, one is not left in doubt of the fact that there is something fundamentally wrong with the present system of delivery of these services to the various communities.

To be compliant with the present efforts of globalization, it is pertinent to re-examine and revitalize the present system of service delivery to our various communities. Priority must
be given to community involvement in all efforts aimed at improving the lots of the communities. The people know best where their shoes pinch them most and should therefore be involved in finding solutions to their needs. The extension agents should be trained in order to improve their ability to mobilize the communities to get more involved in projects meant for the promotion of their welfare. They should make the communities appreciate the reasons why they have to find solutions to their own problems rather than wait for the government to do everything for them.

This paper provides some hints on strategies that could be adopted by the extension workers to facilitate the people’s involvement in the promotion of grassroot developmental efforts.

Definition of Some Key Terms

Globalization refers to things affecting the world, it is derived from the word ‘global’ (Oxford Dictionary, 2000). According to Jike (2003), Globalization is the unitarization of the world as a single space’. He further submits that globalization heralds the emergence of a global cultural system. A global culture that is, more or less, a kaleidoscope of trans – national socio – cultural characterization. This includes the existence of a world Satellite information system; the cultivation of Cosmopolitan lifestyles, the standardization of strategies to address critical world problems e.g. famine, terrorism or the scourge of HIV/AIDS, the emergence of global sports such as Olympic games and the World cup (soccer) competition. Thus, globalization is the concrete structuration of the world at a global level, that the world is a continuously constructed environment.

Community: A community refers to a group of people living in one geographical area. This group of people share common interest and are willing and able to work together to improve their living condition. This group of people may not necessarily have blood relationship and they may be small or large in population.
Community Development: This is a dynamic concept, which can be described as an old idea in a new dress. It uses new methods to achieve long-standing objectives. Community development refers to a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with active participation and on the initiative of the community. The term is also described as encouraging a community to undertake on its own initiative various steps necessary to enrich the life of the community both materially and spiritually. We may therefore say that the ideas essential to community development are community initiative; the approach through the community, community efforts and cooperation. If those ideas inspire and underlie a particular task of development it becomes “community development”. For instance, the fact that United Nations Children and Educational Fund (UNICEF) has constructed a VIP latrine in a rural community does not make the project a community development project. Community development is therefore not what is done but the way it is done. As long as the beneficiaries are left out, the whole idea of community development is defeated.

Community Participation: This implies the involvement of the community in efforts aimed at improving their living condition. The term as also been described as a “process by which a community identifies its needs, orders these needs, develops the confidence and the will to work at the needs, takes action in respect to them and in so doing extends and develop cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community. Community participation is therefore a necessary step for community development actualization because it creates necessary awareness for social action.

Goals of Community Development

The various extension agents play vital roles in the realization of the objectives of community development. The agricultural extension staff, community development workers, information officers, all help to deliver goods and services to the people.
These group of workers need to clearly understand and effectively perform their roles within the various communities they find themselves. According to Abubakar and Kwanashie (1994), community development has four broad objectives, viz:

a) Empowerment
In its broadest sense, community development can be thought of as an instrument of empowerment. Empowerment represents ultimate results of community participation. If empowerment represents an objective it will be understood by extension workers that discrimination on the basis of sex and wealth will be reduced to the barest minimum because the entire community becomes the target audience.

The case of gender discrimination have been amply documented, in any case, when the objective of community participation is on empowering the people to take over matters concerning their living, then it has to be non-discriminatory. For instance, enhanced participation in the agricultural sector requires the empowerment of rural women through the growth of informal groups and organizations, which assist women in:

i. Safeguarding their traditional as well as legal rights e.g. access to land and participation in the decision making process at village and project levels.

ii. Increasing their ability to control and increase their earned income e.g. raising credit facilities.

iii. Increasing their access to agricultural services and resources e.g. extension services, training, inputs and technology.

The extension workers should always bear in mind the complexities in planning and management at the village level. The extension worker should therefore study and understand these complexities so that he can effectively encourage villagers to plan and manage programmes properly. He should bear in mind the fact that he has to be tactical in his intervention and interaction with the people generally.
b) Building beneficiary capacity
Community participation also encourages the building of beneficiary capacity in relation to a project. This makes it possible for beneficiaries to share in the tasks of management of a project through operational responsibility for some aspects of the project. For instance, a beneficiary community could enhance the sustainability of a project which is left in its care by mobilizing themselves to form vigilante groups made up of village hunters to prevent vandalism of such project.

c) Cost sharing
Sharing of cost is another important goal of community development. This does not necessarily imply that the community has to contribute money to fund the project. The provision of labour by the community could also be regarded as part of cost sharing because the money that would have been used to pay for labour would be saved. In some cases, especially for labour intensive projects, the cost of labour forms the bulk of the total cost of the project.

d) Improving projects Efficiency and Effectiveness:
Community participation could also be adopted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of a project. As active participants in the project from the beginning to the end, the community sees it as its own baby and therefore treats it as such.

Strategies of Community Involvement

Although community participation is an essential strategy in community development, the extent of involvement of the community depends to a very large extent on the nature of the project and the characteristics of the target communities. For instance, there is a limit to which the rural communities particularly can be involved in a project like the liquefied Natural Gas Project. This project requires a high level technical manpower. In any case, there are four determinants of level of intensity of participation.
a). The level of information sharing which allows the Project Managers to share information with the beneficiaries in order to facilitate collective or individual action.

b). The level of consultation where the target communities are not merely informed, but consulted on key issues at various stages of the project.

c). The level of decision making where the target communities are expected to play prominent roles in decision making as it affects project choice, design and implementation.

d). The level of initiating action: At this level beneficiaries are able to take the initiative in terms of actions/decisions pertaining to a project. This is the point where the level of community involvement is believed to have reached the highest level.

It is important to note however, that no matter the level of participation, whether low or high, the goals should always be realistic and should address the needs of the community. At the same time, the roles and responsibilities of both the beneficiaries and participating organizations or departments should be clearly delineated. For example, in a particular project, we want to know who should identify the needs of the people, how is the project going to be funded and maintained, who takes charge of the security aspect, etc.

Community Mobilization

Undoubtedly, the gains of community involvement are quite enormous and interesting. Initiating the process may however, be very excruciating if it is not carefully handled because of the nature of our rural communities. It is very important that our extension workers realize and get themselves adequately prepared to face the challenges at the various stages of getting the community involved in any project. An extension worker can adopt the following model to get through to a community:
a). Identification and selection of a community;  
b). Entry into the community to understand the complexity of the community;  
c). Some kinds of community diagnosis involving a more detailed collection of information about the community.

This will also include finding out the felt needs of the community as well as identifying the available human and material resources.

The people can now be mobilized to draw up their scale of preference after which they can commence action on any chosen project. The extension worker should be very careful not to dictate to the people or forcefully impose programmes on them. Where there are no groups or associations, it is the duty of the extension worker to encourage the people to form one as this makes his task a lot easier. The more the number of associations/groups the better for both the community and the extension workers because these groups can be easily used to mobilize community participation in development projects.

Problems of Community Participation

The problems of community participation in the process of development include some of the following:

**High level of illiteracy**: Education makes people amenable to positive change and innovations; it opens up their minds so that they can think wide. There is a preponderance of illiteracy of rural communities in Nigeria. They sometimes are suspicious of initiatives/innovations from the extension workers. They see the educated people as always scheming to take undue advantages of their situation.

**Tradition**: Majority of the rural population are still strongly attached to their tradition and can do anything to protect it. For an example, in some communities it is traditional to the male children to go and fend for themselves from very early ages. These children roam about in the village or even go to the urban centers to beg for food and money.
leaving no room for early formal education. The mass literacy officer therefore faces an arduous task convincing them to send their children to school. Children in some communities are traditionally believed to be gifts from God and seen also as assets to the parents, the people therefore see the Health Officer preaching family planning as a joker.

**Poverty:** Our rural people are largely poor peasant farmers who still practice subsistence agriculture. Community participation especially in projects that are capital intensive therefore becomes a problem. Take for example, the rural electrification projects where generating sets are installed to provide electricity to the community. Many communities find it difficult to maintain the sets, it is either that they are broken down and there is no money to buy spare parts or that there is no fuel to operate the engine.

**Nigerian Factor:** This has to do with corruption, selfishness, insincerity, etc. In the contemporary Nigerian society, values like honesty, patriotism, dedication to duty and so on are fast becoming old and unfashionable ideas. This situation constitutes serious constraints to community participation. The community development officers for example, are expected to visit the various communities regularly and write monthly reports on the various community development projects. The situation today is that community development officers write their reports from their various houses without visiting the communities as expected. In the same vein most of the funds that are meant for various projects in the rural communities end up in various pockets of the government officers at the detriment of grass root development.

**Conclusion**

Our communities, rural and urban, are replete with many cases of uncompleted projects as a result of inadequate planning. If these projects are meant to improve the well being of the people, it is logical therefore that the people should not be left out of it. To promote sustainable community development which is a
major issue in the globalization efforts, all projects aimed at grass root development must therefore involve the beneficiary communities at all stages ranging from project identification, implementation and monitoring.

References


