

Assessment of Local Government and Community Cooperation in Rural Development: A Study of Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7513>

Received: 28 April 2023; Accepted: 12 May 2023; Published: 21 May 2023

ABSTRACT

This study assesses local government and community cooperation in rural development with emphasis on Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The problem of the study focuses poor development of the rural communities, mismatch in the projects initiated and what the communities want and poor consultation of the people and collaboration between the communities and the people. The objectives of the study were to assess the extent to which local government and community cooperation have enhanced the provision of infrastructural facilities; improved the quality of education and provision of healthcare facilities in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi state. Three research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a Descriptive survey research method with a sample size of 400 purposively drawn from a population of 384, 400 in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. A 15-item questionnaire was used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency count, percentage and mean scores. The hypotheses were tested with Pearson correlation analysis. The study revealed that the existing local government and community cooperation in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State has not contributed to high degree in the provision of infrastructural facilities ($0.60 > 0.05$). However, results showed that the existing local government and community cooperation in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State has not contributed to high degree in the quality of education ($0.64 > 0.05$) and the provision of healthcare facilities ($0.62 > 0.05$). The study however concludes that the government cannot adequately provide all the basic needs of the rural population neither would the rural communities do, hence the need for partnership between the two, government/community cooperation in Ikwo local government area has not significantly helped in the provision of infrastructural facilities, also government/community cooperation in Ikwo local government area has not contributed significantly in providing quality education and healthcare facilities to the people. Based on the findings, recommendations include that Government and Communities in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State should intensify their efforts in the provision of infrastructural facilities in the rural areas to achieve rapid and sustainable rural development. Communities in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State should be sensitized on the imperativeness of assisting the government in the provision of quality education to the members of the rural communities. The government should also encourage education by providing help to the poor members of the community to have access to quality education for knowledge and skill acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of rural development has been creating a lot of concern in most third world countries. There has been growing recognition of the importance of rural development as an instrument in the overall development of the contemporary developing world. This is because of the glaring gap between the rural and urban areas in terms of infrastructural, resources distribution, human resources development and

employment, which has made rural development imperative (Ogbazi, 2019). This imbalance has subjected the rural areas to more disadvantaged economic position. It has induced rural – urban migration, thereby, increasing unemployment situation in the urban areas, while, simultaneously depriving the rural areas of their agricultural workforce.

In Nigeria for instance, the recognition of the above problems, instigated the Federal Military Government in 1976, to take a bold initiative to reform the local government system in Nigeria. The essence of the reform was to bring about stable increase in rural productivity and income, diversification of rural economy and general enhancement of the quality of life in the areas (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010 cited in Zakari 2016). In the same vein, the Nigerian Constitution (1999 constitution as amended) provides that every local government in the country shall participate in the economic planning and development of its own area of jurisdiction.

Invariably, the failure of governments' top-down approach and lack of involvement of the people at the grassroots have weakened the confidence of the public in the central authorities. Communities therefore seek solace in indigenous institutions, which pressurize government for attention to development problems in their communities and/or undertake development programmes and projects that they observe that are needed in their immediate communities. The indigenous organizations are associated with self-help projects in their various communities (Ogundipe, 2013).

In order to bring rural development to Ikwo Local government, community cooperation in resources management has come to be seen as perhaps the only way to effectively manage resources and implement adequate programs. With the strategy of development in Ebony state, the strategy of community cooperation in rural development is an important instrument for mobilizing resources and organizing the rural people to take an interest in providing for their well-being. In Spite of the official emphasis on community cooperation in rural development, very few studies have been carried out to probe how actually rural communities and local governments perceive community cooperation and how they go about achieving their objectives in this regard. It is against this background that the study seeks to assess local government and community cooperation in rural development in Ikwo local government area.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, the study seeks to assess the extent to which government and community cooperation have enhanced rural development in Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi State.

The study also, attempts to achieve the following specific objectives;

1. To assess the extent to which government and community cooperation have enhanced the provision of infrastructural facilities in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.
2. To ascertain the extent to which government and community cooperation have improved the quality of education in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.
3. To examine the extent which government and community cooperation have enhanced the provision of healthcare facilities in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Concept of Local Government

Some writers defined Local Government as “local administration set up outside the main focus of the central national or regional administration”. According to the United Nation (UN, 2011) office for public administration, local government is a political subdivision of a nation (or in Federal system or State) which

Constitute by law and has substantial control over local affairs including the power to impose tax or exert labor for prescribed purposes, the governing body such as an entity is selected or otherwise locally elected. The above definition is akin to the one given by Robson (2021) who sees Local Government as, “a territorial non sovereign community possessing the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs”. Looking at it from the Nigeria context, the guideline for 1976 Local government reforms suggested a definition of local government thus, government at the local level which exercised specific powers within defined areas. Viewing the above definitions, Local Government can be seen as the lowest tier of government, established by laws and assigned specific responsibilities.

The concept of local government in a broad term involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grass root level. This implies legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government with a will of its own and performing specific function within the national frame work, (Yusuf, 2011). In the opinion of (Apadorai, 2020), local government is defined as government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitant of a particular district or place.

Odenigwe (2019) on the other hand, sees local government as a system of local administration under which local communities and towns are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social services and public amenities and encourage the cooperation and participation of the inhabitants in the joint endeavor towards improving the living condition.

Local government as observed by (Orewa and Adewumi, 2021) is the lowest unit of administration in a defined geographical area and with common social and political ties, the implication of this definition is that the territorial jurisdiction of the local government has to be clearly defined to enable the residents of the local government be aware of their civil and financial duties for the provision of services and for protection against health and other hazards. Local government is an authority to determine and to execute matters, within a restricted area inside and smaller than the whole state. This implies that local government involves the administering of services on a local basis by local bodies (Zoaka, and Saleh, 2020).

Concept of Community Cooperation

Community cooperation is a situation where rural communities need to actively take part in designing implementing and shaping the project that affect them. The notion for cooperation of people in democratic governance at all the levels of governance was recognized by the African National Congress (ANC) in its policy document, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), in 2014. The RDP purports that democracy requires that all rural people have access to power and the right to exercise their power will ensure that all people participate in the process of reconstructing the country (ANC, 2014 as cited in Tshabalala, 2022). Tshabalala (2022) points out that Cooperation of local communities in rural areas has its unique practice. The policy making in rural development excluded the majority of ordinary people and public policy adopted a minority perspective.

The economy of these circumstances is such that the role of local government now needs to stretch beyond the traditional function associated with infrastructure development to address social and economic development. Development experts are, therefore, expected to adopt programmes that will not only enhance infrastructure development, but will also strive to bring about social upliftment and contribute positively to the lives of people. Again, communities have to be economically affected by the business of the development experts.

Paolo and Freire (2020) argues that “development can only be achieved when humans are for themselves’, when they possess their own decision-making powers, free of oppression and dehumanizing circumstances” (Bailur, 2019). It is argued that one of the things that will enable project initiators to respond to the needs of

its people is working closely with its community. This implies that communities should play a role in the planning and functioning of local municipalities so that they can actively influence decisions that will affect them. This view is echoed by Municipal Systems calls for a government that will respond to the needs of the people and hence, the developmental approach. The goal of the developmental approach is to re-orientate local government to being creative and strategic in developing its local people.

Concept of Rural Development

Rural development is the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas, often relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas (Cogan, 2021). The whole phenomenon of rural development revolves around attempts by governments and people to address the basic factual problems bedeviling the rural areas in respect of basic needs such as safe and hygienic drinking water, the provision of primary health care, feeder road, electricity, schools and so forth. Any area that is without such things is backward and life in it, is certainly miserable and frustrating (Joseph, 2020).

Lea and Chaudhri (2019) view rural development as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people – the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. Rural development strategies can realize their full potential only through the motivation, active involvement and organization at the grassroots level of rural people (Burkey, 2021).

Kakumba and Nsingo (2022) stated that rural development is used to refer to schemes aimed at improving the countryside or peripheral areas, with a characteristic agrarian population. It deals with a range of activities, involving the mobilization of resources in order to empower the people to break away from all structural disabilities that prevent them from enjoying better living conditions. Communities that have a say in the development of policies for their locality are much more likely to be enthusiastic about their implementation (Curry, 2022).

Some writers view rural development as dealing with rising Gross National product (GNP) or increasing per capital income, others like Dudley (2020) sees development as meaning ‘creating conditions for the realization of human potential’. Since the pursuit and attainment of certain high levels of per capital income not being accompanied by discernible changes in the conditions of living of the focus and object of development i.e. man, others have come to define the concept of development as a selective attack on the worst form of poverty. “Development goals must be defined in terms of progressive reduction and eventual elimination of malnutrition, disease, literacy, squalor, unemployment and inequalities”. Joseph (2019) further defines development as: Self-sustained growth: a continuous process of growth is produced by forces within the system and which is absorbed by the system. It is the ability to absorb varieties and changing types of political demands and organization.

Government and Community Cooperation and Public Infrastructure

Community Cooperation empowers the primary beneficiaries of development programmes or project by helping them to break away from a dependency mentality (Burkey, 2019). Creighton (2015:19) also state that community Cooperation promotes self-confidence and self-awareness. Nampila (2022) agrees that this heightened consciousness makes people continuously aware of the reality about them and of their own capacity to transform it. When people have the freedom to participate in activities, it gives them dignity and self-respect (Ministry of Agriculture, 2011 as cited in Nampila, 2020).

Another advantage of community Cooperation is sustainability (Kumar, 2021). Generally, development interventions are funded either by government, foreign Aid, donor agencies etc. Experience has shown that development interventions from external assistance projects usually fail to sustain the required level of

development activity once support or inputs are diminished or withdraw by funding agencies. People's Cooperation is regarded as an essential prerequisite for the continuity of activities. The involvement of local and utilization of local resources generates a sense of ownership over development interventions to the community. This sense of ownership is essential for the sustainability of the interventions even after external funds cease to flow (Kumar, 2022).

Community Cooperation ensures that projects are developed according to the needs of the people (Raniga and Simpson, 2021). This can improve the outcomes of projects through cost sharing, increased efficiency and effectiveness. Through community Cooperation, resources available for development projects will be used more efficiently and fewer costs will be incurred if the people themselves are responsible for the project (Kumar, 2019).

Community Cooperation encourages community self-reliance. Many development interventions have been seen to create a kind of dependence syndrome. For instance, in India, there is a widespread government development programmes, people have started looking to the government for solutions to every problem that they face (Kumar, 2019). The ultimate objective embraces all the positive effects of genuine Cooperation by rural people. Self-reliance demolishes their over-dependency attitudes, enhances awareness, confidence and self initiative. It also increases people's control over resources and development efforts, enables them to plan and implement and also to participate in development efforts at levels beyond their community.

Government/Community Cooperation and the provision of quality education

Governments at all levels decide education policy, including county, city, town and district. Their task is to make critical decisions about funding and pedagogy, while serving as a channel between local communities and state education departments.

Provision of quality education is another priority of the government. Community Cooperation is one of the key ingredients of an empowered community (Reid, 2020). Community Cooperation occurs when a community organizes itself and takes full responsibility for managing its problems. Taking full responsibility includes identifying the problems, developing actions, putting them to place and following through local government in Nigeria has constitutional responsibility in primary education; also, the state and federal government attend to all levels of education, including the primary education. Over the years, local and state governments have constituted the real actors in Nigeria primary education sector through the instrumentality of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA). Constitutionally and financially, local governments remain major actors in primary education, but practically, it is SUBEB who manage schools through LGEA with little or no consultation to local government council, regardless of their huge contributions.

Education is a natural right entitled to any individual and a critical social and economic development, therefore, an article of trade in financial positions, but it varies from another service because it is a community feature. Education yields in both the private and public sector in terms of learning and higher learning more so, it benefits the society in social ways whereby a farmer may become more creative through literate skills, also a literate woman may be capable in taking good care of her family health needs, lastly an educated individual can exercise the social and political rights as a better citizen. Therefore it is essential for the government to partner with communities to invest in education since it yields progressive externalities. It is safe to say that government/community cooperation has not impacted positively in education. Government should partner with local communities in the following ways to endure the provision of quality education in the local communities;

Provide quality education whereby the government ensures that the public schools offer a high quality of knowledge to the learners. The private school has always given competition to public school by acquiring high grades in their examinations thus attracting more investors in their business compared to the public (Horn and Paslov, 2021).

The government should partner with communities and make money available to fund education. A good attention must be given to providing funds to public schools to procure the needed infrastructure and facilities. The public schools need to be well equipped. They can also offer subsidies to families to afford to send their children to school. Additionally, the government can provide free books and other materials so that families don't have to spend money on them.

Government and Community Cooperation and the Provision of Healthcare Services

WHO defines health as a fundamental human right and a social goal the attainment of which requires a concerted action by the health sector and all the other sectors of society. In the opinion of Maxwell and Conway (2019), health is also a social achievement or goal. Social goals, such as improving the quality of life and health status, are achieved through social means, including communities and individual people accepting greater responsibility for health and actively participating in attaining them.

At the core of the right to health is the dignity of each and every person. The recognition of the dignity of every man and woman provides the most important reason for planning and implementing patient-centered services. Social services (of which health services are an important component) can contribute to safeguarding and promoting human dignity, addressing persistent situations of serious disparity and inequality, Esman(2021). People's participation in and contribution to health systems has been recognized as central for primary health care and accepted as an essential element of many public health interventions. The health reforms of the 1990s have given less attention to community participation and social values, focusing more on technical, economic and management factors in health systems. Initiatives taken up by civil society to address the HIV epidemic have been a remarkable exception to this situation.

The challenges posed by major epidemics, such as HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, and the role civil society has played in helping individuals and families to cope with them, have certainly contributed to making people, including health policy-makers, more aware of some limitations of the health services (public and private), particularly in terms of inequality in coverage and access for people with the lowest income or living in remote areas. Burkey argues that building an operational partnership with the community, with the goal of improving the health status of the population, is a step beyond participation and involvement. In a partnership, the institution that has the mandate to provide health and social services to address the essential needs of the population intervenes through its normative role and professional expertise to support the community in its own endeavor to achieve better health status. Essential to the creation of a formal or informal partnership is clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of all partners: what each partner can contribute, because of its specificity, to the common goal. Each partner, alone, may not be able to achieve the goal without the synergistic contribution of the other. The establishment of partnerships between the institution and the society requires that people empower themselves to be able to assume such responsibility.

A partnership for health between the government or an institution and the community is based on the commitment of both actors to actively collaborate to support the quality of health services or to make public health programmes more effective. This formal or informal collaboration can only be established if political leaders and administrators take on a specific commitment to social development and if the society is ready to assume its responsibility.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research adopts “community action theoretical model” as its framework of analysis. The community action theoretical model was propounded by Freire in 1973. The theory emphasizes the need for communities to collectively strengthen their capacity to develop through educational attainment (Kulig, 2019). Implicit in this theory is that residents in rural communities can team together to attain socio-economic development through education (Boreham, 2020). This means that community action model involves participatory action approaches and is asset based. That is to say that it builds on the strengths of a community to create changes from within (Racher, 2022). Its intention is to change by building community capacity, working in collaboration with communities and providing a framework for residents to acquire skills and resources necessary for assessing their socio-economic conditions (Lavery, 2019). When they have done this, they can plan, implement and evaluate actions designed to improve those conditions.

This means that the model is designed to increase the capacity of communities and organisations in addressing their socio-economic determinants that will positively influence development in their rural communities (Anderson & McFarlane, 2021).

The relevance of this theory to this study is hinged on the fact that it explained the contributions of town development unions in the funding of basic education and health facilities in rural communities in Ebonyi state in general and Ikwo in particular. The theory also enabled us analyse the efforts of the local communities at the local level of development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of findings obtained from statistical testing of the hypotheses, there is empirical evidence that government and community cooperation play a significant role in developing the rural areas. Local government/community cooperation is one of the key ingredient for developing an empowered community. This happens when a community organizes itself and takes full responsibility for managing its affairs. The study contends that local government is the principal actor for social, economic and political mobilization and galvanization of citizens for effective participation in community development. Many rural areas have benefited in one way or the other from various projects and programs executed through government/community cooperation. The government cannot adequately provide all the basic needs of the rural population neither would the rural communities do, hence the need for partnership between the two. However, studies reveal that government/community cooperation in Ikwo local government area has not significantly helped in the provision of infrastructural facilities. Also, government/community cooperation in Ikwo local government area has not contributed significantly providing quality education and healthcare facilities to the people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study;

1. Government and Communities in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State should come closer to intensify their efforts in the provision of infrastructural facilities in the rural areas to achieve rapid and sustainable rural development. Projects such as the provision of portable water, electricity, good road network, mechanized farm equipment and establishment of small and medium scale industries should be carried out.
2. Communities in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State should be sensitized on the imperative of assisting the government in the provision of quality education to the people living in the rural

communities. The government should also encourage education by providing assistance through scholarships to indigent members of the community so that they can have access to quality education for knowledge and skill acquisition.

3. Government should at all times organize medical outreach in the rural communities and make other healthcare facilities accessible to the people. This will help to ensure healthy living among members of the rural communities.

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