

Community Capacity Building and Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Grassroots Africa

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Abstract

The attainment of sustainable development goals is not isolated from an inclusive and integrated strategic development agenda that is encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals. However, what seems to be the gap in the attainment of these goals is the consistent deprivation of beneficiaries of development programmes through exclusion, in the domains of community engagement, empowerment, experience and evidence in development. Therefore, the attainment of sustainable development goals in Africa is premised on community capacity building with the variants of growing sustained economy, rural driven development, promotion of investment and systemic growth, coupled with human capital development for wealth creation. The multipliers or deliverables inherent in community capacity building are then evident in good governance, which has the elements of democracy, institutional capacity, security, human rights and promotion of social justice in Africa. This paper aims at situating the attainment of development goals in Africa on inclusive and integrated strategic approach that is driven by variants of community capacity building in Africa.

Keywords: Community-capacity-building; sustainable Development; Attainment; Grassroots; Exclusion.

Background to the Study

Many have reasoned that community capacity building is a process of empowering individual, groups, and nations at various levels for the attainment and institutionalization of sustainable development goals, particularly at the grass root. It then becomes both a concept and strategy that bears relevance to all developmental processes of communities and society as a whole, while specifically addressing disadvantaged communities and population groups that have been excluded from the empowerment process in the first instance. The import of such reason is that, the promotion of community capacity building recognizes that sustained economic and social transformations that is engineered by empowerment will result in an increasingly divided society with even more deeply entrenched pocket of the excluded, except new and more effective interventions change the trajectory (Hounslow, 2002).

However, changing the trajectory depends not just on the empowerment processes, but on the adoption of a more impact based approach that is derived from, and consistent with community capacity. For instance, a framework developed by Longwe (1991) on empowerment, provides some useful insights into what empowerment depicts in terms of the degree of welfare attained,

that is, where basic needs are satisfied; the degree of access, where equal access to education, land and credit is assured; the degree of conscientization and awareness- raising, where structural and institutional discrimination is addressed; the degree of participation and mobilization, where equal taking of decisions is enabled and the degree of control, where individual can make decisions and these are fully recognized and adopted for action. These five frameworks in their sense of application situates empowerment as both process and outcome which is attainable through community capacity building with its variants of engagement, empowerment, experience and evident (outcomes) as derived from the core elements of education (Oghenekohwo, 2012).

Operationalising Community Capacity Building

The underlying theory of community capacity building is that of deliberate inclusion without exclusion, which is explained as the “deprivation syndrome”. Ramonet (1999) reminded of more evidence of such worsening inequalities and deprivation which equates exclusion. According to Ramonet (1999), exclusion is overwhelming as two hundred and twenty-five (225) of the richest people in the world have a combined wealth of more than one trillion dollars that is equal to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the world's population then estimated at over 2.5 billion people. Besides, Oghenekohwo (2012) reported that, among the 4.4 billion people in developing countries, mostly in Africa, almost three in every five lack basic education, a third have no safe drinking water, a quarter have inadequate shelter, and a fifth are significantly undernourished (HDR, cited in Huddle, 2002). This deprivation syndrome has accentuated disparity, various forms of violence, loss of cultural diversity, critical fundamental values, insecurity, terrorism, competition and increasing consumerism, materialism and individualism which are mostly evident an grassroots' Africa.

The stance here is that, to address such entrenched exclusion in order to attain sustainable development goals, a new thinking and operational efficiency is contextualized in community capacity building as community capacity building in the view of Hounslow (2002) has become a central objective in a wide range of public policies and development programmes geared at ensuring sustainable transformation of all excluded sections of our human development. It must then be accepted that, capacity building approach to the attainment of sustainable development goals in grassroot Africa is an acknowledgement that certain groups and communities are in degree of being “left behind” (excluded), in our society and that they need to “catch up”. In this analysis, it implicitly endorses the value of equal opportunity and the desirability of greater social equity which of course is possible, because, capacity building as opposed to “development,” is also predicated on the conviction that all communities- whether geographic communities or communities of interest- have strength or assets to pursue sustainable development taken off from the grassroot.

Operationally, community capacity building from the literature depicts the degree to which a community can develop, implement and sustain actions which allow it to exert greater control over its physical, social, economic and cultural environment (Littejohns and Thompson, 2001). In their own submission, Howe and Cleary, (2001) advanced it to mean the ability of individuals, organizations and communities to manage their own affairs, work collectively to foster and

sustain positive changes. In other words, to Howe et al, community capacity building relates to the capacity or ability of people in communities to participate in actions based on community interests, both as individuals, groups, organizations and networks. The activities oriented actions in this context are to include:

Building social capacity: this implies building relationships, trust, share norms and networks, people taking part in community initiatives, groups and organizations, and these groups communicating with the wider population as volunteers, members and participants;

Delivering services: this can either be autonomous services provided by communities, or specialist services provided by community or voluntary groups, controlled by contracts or service level agreement with public agencies;

Involvement in governance: representing the interest of all local people or of particular groups in influencing decisions that affect the quality of local life. Consistent with these three activities is the meaning of community capacity building as activities, resources and supports that strength the skills and abilities of people and community groups to take effective actions and leading roles in the development of their communities for sustainable development. Therefore, community capacity building enhances three key variables in the attainment of sustainable grassroots development. These variables in activity types are:

Development of skills: - learning and training opportunities for individual and groups, and sharing through networks and mutual support, to develop skills, knowledge and confidence. This is the engagement perspective to community capacity building which is a variant of the new paradigm in the capacity building process for grassroots' development.

Developing structures: - developing the organizational structure and strengths of community groups, communities of interest and networks. Again, the focus here is on empowering the individual, groups and other agencies involved in the process for sustainable change in attitude and development.

Development support- developing the availability of practical support to enable the development of skills and structures. These three activities enable community to achieve specific purpose through the identification of needs, opportunities and responsibilities, plan, organize and take actions and also, evaluate the effectiveness and impact of actions. Thus, the goal of community capacity building is to tackle problems related to policy and methods of development, while considering the potentials, limits and needs of the people concerned (UNDP, 2011).

Meanwhile, the UNDP (2011) posits that capacity building takes place on an individual level, institutional level and the societal level. Community capacity building at an individual level requires the development of conditions that allow individual participants to build and enhance existing knowledge and skills. It calls for the institutionalization of conditions that allow individuals to engage in the process of learning and adapting to change through continuing engagement in the search for knowledge by critical thinking.

Community capacity building at institutional level involves aiding pre-existing institutions in the communities, it does not entail the creation of new institutions, rather, modernizing (capacitating) existing institutions and supporting them in forming sound policies, organizational structures, and effective methods of management and revenue (resource) control. Community capacity building at the societal level supports the establishment of a more “interactive public administrations that are learn equally from its actions and from feedback it receives from the population at large. It implies the development of public administration” that are responsible, responsive, transparent and accountable to the people.

In the United Nations Development Programme's 2008-2013 strategic plan for development, capacity building is the “the organization's core contribution to development”. The UNDP focuses on building capacity on an institutional level and offers a 5-step process for systematic capacity building. Which, are to:

- I. engage stakeholders on capacity development;
- ii. assess capacity needs and assets;
- iii. Formulate a capacity development response;
- iv. Implement a capacity development response; and
- v. Evaluate capacity development.

Most critical in these five steps is the assessment of capacity needs and assets for its application. This is so, because; assessment defines the institutional arrangement for capacity, leadership, and knowledge (experience) and accountability measure for sustainable development. Hence, community capacity building goes beyond training to include, human resource development, organizational development and institutional and legal framework development thereby making legal and regulatory changes to enable communities, institutions and agencies at all levels and in all sectors, to enhance their capacities for sustainable development. In general, therefore, it is appropriate to synthesize these variants of community capacity building by considering what Chaskin (1999) suggested on this subject thus:

Community capacity is the interaction of human, organizational and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and / or organized efforts by individuals, organizations, and the networks of association among them and between them, and the broader systems of which the community is a part. (P.4)

Implicit in the above view are six dimensions within which community capacity building is contextualized as well as the template for the attainment of sustainable development goals in grass root Africa as derived from community capacity building respectively.

Dimensions on Community Capacity Building

Derived from the above suggested definition, Chaskin (1999) noted that such framework goes beyond the conceptualization of community capacity itself, as it incorporates additional components that speak on intentional attempts to build community capacity, the influence of context, and suppositions about community level outcomes. Based on these, Chaskin (1999) proposed six dimensions on community capacity building.

The first dimension describes the fundamental characteristics of communities with capacity. The focus is on the identification of the differentially endowed types and levels of resources-services, physical infrastructure, housing, jobs, education, income that can be drawn on by its residents and such differentiation often corresponds with the nature of residential segregation across communities by race and class (Jargowsky, 1997; Massey and Eggers, 1990; Massey and Denton, 1993). The second dimension identifies the level of social interaction within which capacity is embedded in a community and through which it may be actively engaged, supported, or built. The third concerns the particular functions of community capacity once it is engaged. The fourth dimension relates to capacity building, focusing on the strategies that may be consciously developed to promote particular kinds of community capacity toward the accomplishment of particular kinds of community outcomes. The fifth dimension concerns conditioning influences that have an influence on community capacity, either contributing to or inhibiting its existence or attempts to build it. The sixth dimension pertains to community level outcomes beyond those associated with community capacity itself. Therefore, a community with capacity based on existing studies, functioning, suggests four fundamental characteristics.

Fundamental Characteristics of Community Capacity

In order to deliver on the attainment of sustainable development goals, a community with capacity is to be characterized by the following variable namely:

- (a) A sense of community, a degree of connectedness among members and recognition of mutuality of circumstances. One component of a sense of community is the existence and sustenance of a threshold level of collectively held values, norms and vision. It may include an effective dimension – sense of trust, ownership, belonging and recognition of mutuality and a cognitive dimension – ways in which community members ascribe meaning to their membership in a group (McMillian and Chavis, 1986).
- (b) Existence of a level of community on the part of particular individuals, groups, or organizations that take responsibility for what happens in the community and that invest time, energy and other resource in promoting its wellbeing. Thus, there must be stakeholders for the collective well-being and willingness to perform actively in that role (Logan and Rabrenovic, 1990; Williams, 1985).
- (c) A community with capacity will have mechanisms for problem- solving through which commitment can be translated into action. The ability to address issues, identifies priorities, and solve problems is an important component of virtually all definitions of capacity relating to community. (Knoke, 1990; Mesch and Schwirian, 1996).
- (d) A community with capacity is access to resources (economics, human, physical, political) beyond the neighbourhood. There must be existence of both internal and external resources as required for development and also, the types of resources to which access is necessary are varied (Jargowsky, 1997; Kretzmann & Mcknight, 1993).

In practices building community capacity entails increasing the community's knowledge, to improve their attitudes and practices toward self- reliant development, whereby, self-reliant development implies, a community being responsible; possessing the ability to confront local realities; working together; promoting social integration; respecting social groups, and building networks of cultural movement. This process is driven by principles now reasoned as consistent

with the process of community capacity building. The principles, according to Akintayo and Oghenekohwo, (2004) are as follows:

- i. Human beings are central to the process of community capacity building;
- ii. Dignity of human beings is central;
- iii. A definite choice of a new society and development approach;
- iv. A call to action
- v. mobilizing the people
- vi. An attitude of reliance on internal resource; and
- vii. Mobilization for sustainable development.

Sustainable Development Goals in Grassroot Africa

The strategies for the attainment of sustainable development in grassroot Africa are ever constant; however, it is the operationalisation of these strategies that have remained varied depending on the economic and political paradigms respectively. One may recall that sustainable development has to do with participatory development, human development and environmental development (UNDP, 1990). Besides, one is also aware that the premises of sustainable development include equity, stability, food security and co-evolutionary growth. In other to sustain these premises, sustainable development according to Eboh, Okoye and Ayichi (1995) would require simultaneous progress along each of the dimensions of economic, environmental, human, institutional and technological for which community capacity building must drive the process.

The options that are now available in line with community capacity building dimensions are empowering grassroot people, creating growth and employment incentives through wealth creation, ensuring food security, investing in human capacity, protecting the environment and sustaining good governance that ensures accountability, probity, and trust. All these are critical to the attainment of sustainable development in grassroot Africa.

Operational Issues in Community Capacity Building

There is the livelihood that, the translation of the broad notion of community capacity building into actionable steps and outcomes may be complicated by operational issues such as the role of Staff/leadership which is critical in catalyzing, organising, facilitating, and managing both a range of activities and a range of constituencies. The leadership acumen of staff is called to reason in their organization skills, communication skills community planning activities and organization fields. Chaskin (1999) also identified funding constraints, collaboration, participation, legitimacy, and community consensus as critically contingent upon the translation of community capacity building into attainment of sustainable grassroot development in Africa.

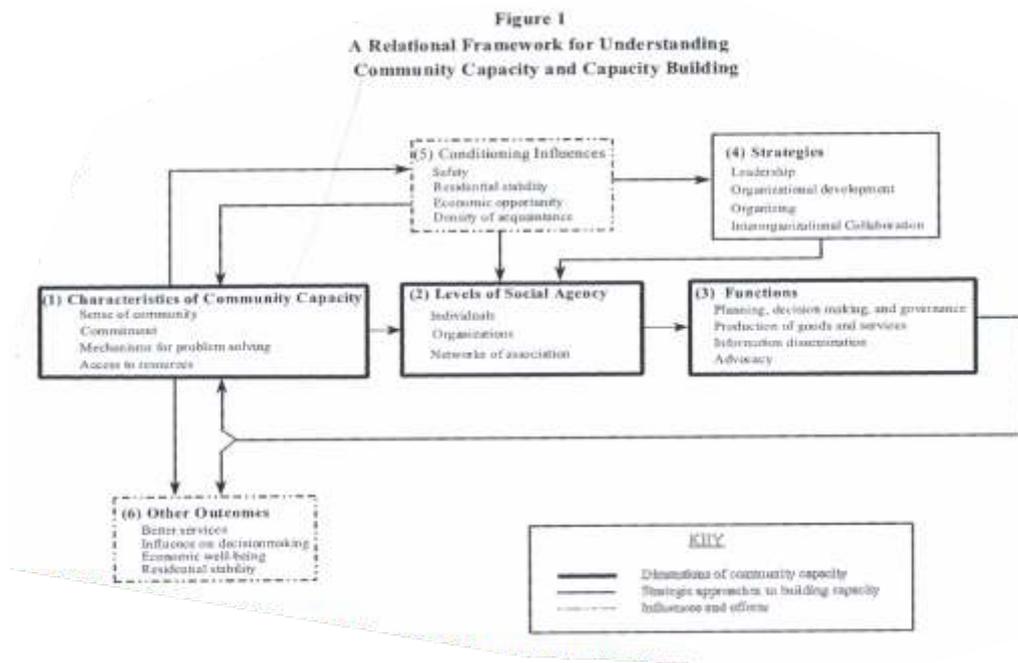
Conclusion and Recommendations

Attainment of sustainable development starts from community development which is derived from concerted effort, engineered through empowerment as variant of community capacity. Originally, building community capacity must then focus on these components. This is essentially the approach espoused by Kretzmann and Mcknight(1993), who suggest that

community development begins with assessing the assets of individuals, neighbourhood groups, and local institutions in a community and engaging in a process of connections, organizing and orchestrating instrumental links among them.

Within a community, a focus on strengthening networks of association among individual is most likely to succeed when targeting instrumental issues to foster communication and mobilize participation. Therefore, successfully building community capacity within a neighbourhood may thus increase that system's ability to produce certain public goods locally, connect residents and organizations to opportunity and resources, and enhance (capacitate) the influence of community actors on public policy, service delivery, and development activities as driven by exogenous action as shown in the template of community capacity building shown below in figure 1

Figure 1: Template on Community Capacity Building



Source: Chaskin 1990

As evident in the above template, the conclusion is that, exclusion needs to be eliminating in order to ensure sustainable development. Such process of elimination is made possible through community capacity building that operates in the domains of positive development engagement, empowerment as showcased by experience and evident in better community services with influence on decision making, economics and social-well-being as well as residential stability. The multiplier effect of community capacity building are then evident in communities' ability to promote good governance, trust institutional stability and capacity, social justice and security of the community of interest in grassroots Africa.

Arising from the above, it is recommended that grassroots Africa must be effectively communicated through the network of community radio and other development media services. This is to facilitate development communication among people of shared interest and values. Access to development infrastructure as promoted through integrated strategic development agenda is also crucial and vital to the elimination of all forms of exclusion in grassroots development.

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