

Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria: the Participatory Communication Approach

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Abstract

This study explores how participatory communication can be used as a facilitator of poverty alleviation. It seeks to examine how participation, involvement and interest of beneficiaries in poverty alleviation projects will facilitate the process. This has become necessary given the level of poverty in Nigeria despite efforts by both the government and non-governmental agencies to contain the scourge. Development communication has been chosen as the theoretical framework, criticizing the extant paradigm of modernization, and arguing for the alternative paradigm of participation and self-reliance. Descriptive and evaluative design approaches have been adopted to elicit data from members of the Community and Social Development Project(CSDP) host communities in Jalingo, Local Government Area, while documented assessment of CSDP micro projects in Taraba State from 2009-2012, questionnaire and interview serve as the major sources of data. The research discovers that community members were involved and actively participated in the activities of the CSDP micro projects in their communities. Results also indicate that the projects have impacted positively the lives of beneficiaries. Thus, the research concludes that participatory communication is key to poverty alleviation, hence recommending the approach to policy makers and development planners for maximum results.

Keywords: *Poverty Alleviation, Strategic Communication, Participatory Communication, Community Development*

Background to the Study

Poverty in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. It is a scourge that has paralysed the citizens long ago. While governments at all levels have put in place measures to contain it, the level of poverty in the country is still high. Describing the situation, Udoakah (1998) submits that:

...the majorities of Nigerians are not just poor from the standpoint of comparative analysis, but are facing a vicious circle in which in the words of Townsend and Davidson (1982), through variety of mechanism, they are locked into material, educational, environmental and social disadvantage for a lifetime and even sometimes for generations...

Worrisome is the fact that the various administrations in the country over the years had made efforts to fight the scourge, but most of the projects embarked upon did not yield the desired results, while some were completely exercises in futility. Some of these programmes include National and State Directorates of Employment, the Peoples Bank of Nigeria, Agricultural and Cooperative Banks, and recently the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme SURE-P and YouWin.

One is thus tempted to Examine why poverty continues to rear its ugly head and linger around in the face of these measures. Scholars have identified some of the reasons for the failure of these programmes to include corruption, paucity of funds and crises. Other reasons adduced as being responsible for the failure of the programmes include non-participation of beneficiaries at the planning and implementation stages, coupled with the top-down approach to programme design (Imoh 2013), inadequate monitoring and absence of sustainability plans (Marafa 2012). Thus Ejiofor (2012) attribute the increased number of poor people in the country to the failure of these poverty alleviation projects. The quest to evolve a communication approach that would best complement development programmes for more impact has led to a call for a paradigm shift, ushering on board the new paradigm of participation. Participatory communication according to Anaetoet al (2010) is the process of involving the local community in identifying their development problems, deciding their many dimensions, identifying workable solutions and taking decisions on a concrete set of actions to experiment or implement. Oji (2009) describes participatory communication as a communication model which aims to reconstruct the role of the public in the communication process or in communication/information campaign. The model according to him provides an ideal framework for the public to participate actively in the development communication process. Thus it pulls the public off the object-subject relationship, giving rise to a more participatory development process.

This model if properly incorporated or integrated into the planning of development programmes would go a long way to carry all the people involved for greater results. The Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) present a classical example of how this model could be utilized for more impact. The scheme which is a World Bank assisted programme is aimed at accelerating the pace of poverty alleviation at the grassroots. (Demola 2012) It took off in 2009 as a n offshoot of the Local Empowerment and Environment Management Programme (LEEMP) and the Community based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP) (Marafa 2012).

This research thus seeks to evaluate the communication strategies of the scheme from the standpoint of participatory communication. It will therefore help to ascertain how participatory communication can be effective in a developing country like Nigeria. This will go a long way to enable the study to proffer recommendations that will help reposition poverty alleviation schemes towards the right track that will lead to more practical results to help actualize the dream of poverty eradication in Nigeria

Statement of the problem

The failure of poverty alleviation programmes in the country to yield the desired fruits, coupled with the increasing rate of poverty across the country has called for concern. The quest to unravel what is behind the deadlock has necessitated several researches aimed at providing the best approaches to poverty alleviation.

Imoh (2013) asserts that Nigeria has had long experience of autocratic administrations under the military dispensations after independence. During this period, vertical or top-down modes of communication dominated communication strategies of most of the programmes aimed at curbing the menace of poverty. This top-down approach to poverty alleviation has made beneficiaries of the projects to feel that their initiatives are disregarded, a notion which according to Imoh (2013) served as a cog in the wheel of previous development programmes. Even today under democratic dispensation, most project officers and development planners have been brainwashed by the autocratic philosophy to believe that the magic bullet theory and modernization ideology which ascribe all powers to the media and policy makers, viewing the audience as passive participants are the best approaches to poverty alleviation.

This is a problem. The questions that thus bug society are: what has participatory communication to do with poverty alleviation? Does the neglect of beneficiaries from participation have anything to do with the failure of poverty alleviation programmes? How does the involvement of beneficiaries at the planning and execution stages of poverty alleviation projects influence their success? After all, how does good communication approach affect the speedy completion of poverty alleviation projects? These questions have constituted the motivation for the researcher to embark on this study, the solution to which according to Imoh (2013) would help society appreciate the role of participatory communication in poverty alleviation.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the effect of participation of beneficiaries of poverty alleviation projects on the effectiveness of the process.

Literature Review

Poverty and the Nigerian Socio-Economic Milieu

A plethora of definitions about poverty exist from various perspectives, The United Nations Environment Programme UNEP (2005) define poverty as the inability to afford basic food and non-food items. It is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. Thus, when people are unable to eat, go to school, have access to good health care, then they can be described to be in poverty regardless of their income.

According to the World Health Organization WHO (2005), poverty is associated with the undermining of a range of key human attributes. The poor are exposed to greater personal and environmental health risks, are less well nourished, have less information and are less able to access health care facilities. They thus, have a higher risk of illness and disability. This situation has been obtainable in Nigeria for quite a long time. According to Orji (2010), the nation's effort to turn its economy around through the implementation of economic adjustment policies have failed to yield the desired results. To this end, the country has since plunged further into bad economic climate that breed poverty. Further poverty problems are encountered when government intervention efforts to bring succour to vulnerable groups also fails. Today, the incidence of poverty is very high in the country and hardly bearable by citizens. According to Elijah and Ogunlade, (2012), poverty in Nigeria can be traced back to the 1960s. At the start of the 1960s, the basis of the Nigerian economy was a well-diversified agricultural sector that supported 75% of the population, provided 68% of the GDP and 78% of exports and as well supplied the people with 94% of their food.

Per capita income was estimated at US \$94 and GDP growth was rapid at an annual rate of 5%. This has changed over the years with the rise of a new development pattern. Agriculture did not develop because of the growing burden on taxations. Latter, rapidly growing industries began to exert considerable influence on the economy, including demands for special protection from imports. This led to a shift in the pattern of industrialization from the processing of agricultural products for exports towards simple import situations, as well as the emergence of petroleum extraction as a leading growth sector.

In the mid-1960s, growing regional tensions and the identification of the political parties seeking ethnic interests created a climate of unrest and political uncertainty that was compounded by civil war. This caused major losses in production. Again, there was a sharp decline in foreign exchange earnings and government revenues attributable to loss of all on-shore production of oil while foreign exchange was rational during the war years with a series of increasing stringent direct and indirect controls. Orji (2012) adds:

...indeed, Nigeria is still undergoing a difficult political and economic transition after several years of military rule. The problems include pervasive poverty and widespread unemployment, deterioration of government institutions and inadequate capacity at all levels of government to deliver critical services effectively ... little growth in the non-oil private economy and limited self-empowerment among local communities.

Gbola (2012) in his submission avers that poverty in Nigeria is rising with almost 100 million people living on less than a dollar per day, despite strong economic growth. The percentage of Nigerians living in absolute poverty i.e. those who can afford only the bare essentials of food, shelter and clothing rose to 60.9% in 2010, compared to 54.7% in 2004. According to Patience (2012), although Nigerian economy is projected to continue growing, poverty is likely to get worse, as the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. Thus, it remains a paradox that while the Nigerian economy is growing, the population of Nigerians living in poverty increases every year.

The National Poverty Eradication Programme NAPEP (2010) estimated that the trend might have increased further by 2011 if the potential positive impacts of several anti - poverty and employment generation intervention programmes are not taken into account. According to Gbola (2012), the North Eastern region (a geopolitical zone where Taraba state belongs) and North West are the poorest regions in Nigeria with 77.7% and 76.3% respectively. The South West has the lowest level of poverty rating 59%. National Bureau of Statistics in 2010 stated that poverty rate in Nigeria may rise to 71.5%. Although the World Bank recently reports a seeming drop in the level of poverty, the story is not entirely a new one.

Principles and Practice of Participatory Communication Approach

From the onset, there is a great need to define participation. Anaeto et al (2010) defines participation as the active involvement of target beneficiaries in the process of planning, implementing and follow up of development programmes. They added that participation is an important element in any development programme, hence sustainable development cannot be attained without the full participation of the target group of people.

Anaeto et al (2010) also contends that development is not something that can be brought from outside and thrust on the people. Each society must define its own model of development in the light of its specific context, culture, resources and values. Participatory communication, therefore, is about seeking the active involvement and participation of community members and groups in development initiatives through a strategic utilization of various communication strategies. Bessette (2004) in Anaeto et al (2010) says participatory communication is the process of involving the local community in identifying their development problems, discovering its many dimensions, identifying potential solutions and taking decision on a concrete set of actions to experiment or implement.

Participatory communication according to Boafa (2006) puts accent on the process of planning and using communication resources, channels, approaches and strategies in programmes, designed to bring about progress, change or development and on the involvement of the people or community in development efforts. It can be summarized that participatory communication entails deploying the arsenal of communication and advocacy to seek the consent and involvement of the people in the development plans of their communities. Participatory communication is based on self reliance and self-development. It seeks involvement of people in their own development process. Participatory communication emphasizes the planning and implementation of development programmes with the people, and not for them. According to Enwefah (2007) in Anaeto et al (2010), in participatory communication: People are allowed to identify or decide what their needs are, plan how to achieve their set goals, obtain whatever assistance that may come from government and implement their plan on their own, with the development communicator leading from behind. In participatory communication, the development planner comes in as a facilitator of the development process, rather than as an expert. His task is to bring together all stake holders community members, government, NGOs in dialogue and exchange of ideas on development needs and required development intervention.

According to Baofa (2006) in Anaetoet al (2010), participatory communication promotes dialogue and horizontal exchange of ideas, views and opinions. Participation translates as individuals being active in the development programme process, contributing ideas, taking initiatives and articulating their needs and problems while asserting their autonomy. Thus all social groups are able to contribute to resolving their community problems. Thus Oji (2009) puts it that participatory communication entails working with the people and not foisting ones development ideas on a target social system. It gives voice to the people and allows them to decide what their needs are. Oji (2009) concludes that the proprietary ingredients of participatory communication would allow intended project beneficiaries to take charge and be owners of development projects.

The Role of Communication in Participatory Development

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (1994) as cited in Anaetoet al (2010) identifies the roles communication plays in participatory development which include:

- i. Better planning and programme formulation by consulting the people and actively involving them in making decisions that affect them.
- ii. People's participation and community mobilization by building their confidence to make decisions and carry them out as a community in a self reliant way.
- iii. Changing lifestyles through the use of mass media to raise awareness, peer-counseling techniques of interpersonal communication and social communication methods to pioneer attitudinal change.
- iv. Improve training through communication media to brings alive new ideas and techniques, and energize programmes of training and human resource development.
- v. Rapid spread of information far and wide throughout the region or an entire country through the mass media.
- vi. Effective management and coordination, communication approaches are crucial when a new development orientation is being introduced within a ministry, when strengthened teamwork is needed and policy makers need to be kept abreast of the field situation; and.
- vii. Gaining the attention of decision makers and securing their support.

How to Apply Participatory Communication for Poverty Alleviation and Community Development

Bessette (2004) in Anaetoet al (2010) developed a model for participatory communication in poverty alleviation. The model shows the process of planning and developing participatory communication programme which constitutes a continual process, not necessarily a linear one. Each step in the model is about building mutual understanding and collaboration as well as facilitating participation. Below is how the Bessette model of participatory communication can be applied for poverty alleviation.

1. Establishing a relationship with the local community and understanding the local setting.
2. Involving the community in the identification of a problem, its potential solution and the decision to carrying out a concrete initiative.

3. Identifying the different communities groups and other stakeholders concerned with the identified problem and initiative.
4. Identifying communication needs objectives and activities.
5. Identifying appropriate communication tools
6. Preparing and pre-testing communication contents and materials.
7. Facilitating partnerships
8. Monitoring and evaluating the communication strategy and documenting development or research process.
9. Planning, sharing and utilization of result.

In this regard, the services of the communication expert/planner will be required. He will be responsible for facilitating dialogue and the exchange of ideas, encouraging thinking about local development problems and possible solutions, supporting efforts at awareness building, motivating, learning and implementing the development action. Other functions include ensuring the effective circulation of information among different participants, developing local collaboration and partnerships by establishing alliances with local resource persons among others.

Theoretical Framework: Development Communication

This study is hinged on the principles of development communication theory. Development communication itself is a mother theory that harbours a lot of theories. While some of them are linear and western centric, others are developed to suit the economically disadvantaged condition of Africa and other developing countries.

This research critiques the extant development paradigm of modernization and the linear model of development, arguing for a self-reliant and participatory model of development. Development communication, according to Moemaka (1991) is the application of the process of communication to the development process. It is the use of the principles and practice of exchange of ideas to fulfill development objectives.

Bafo (2006) as cited in Anaeto et al (2010) defines development communication as the planned and systematic application of communication resources, channels, approaches and strategies to support the goals of socio-economic, political and cultural development. The term 'development communication' was coined by Quebral Nora (1972) who defines it thus: Development communication is the art and science of communication, applied for the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from a state of poverty to a more dynamic state of economic growth which makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potentials.

Jamis (1975) as cited in Anaeto et al (2010) said development communication is a purposive communication, value laden and pragmatic. Meanwhile Anaeto et al (2010) enumerates the attributes of development communication to include; participation, responsiveness, common ground, education, and simple as well as relevant language.

Dominant Paradigm of Development Communication

This school of thought is the oldest in development communication, anchored on the principles of the stimulus Response theories of communication. Theories in this school view development as a one way process that can be transferred from the West to the South. The basic theories in this group include modernization theory and the linear model.

Modernization Theory

This theory is concerned with the development gap between the North and South, and how best to reduce this gap. According to Anaeto et al (2010), the theory basically states that for third world countries to be developed, they have to undergo the process of modernization thus modernization is the answer to development. Learner (1963) in Anaeto et al (2010) sees modernization at the social level as the intense application of scientific technology, specialization of labour, interdependence of markets, large concentration of capital and rising level of material well being According to Rustow (1964), at the individual level, modernization may be viewed as informed contact with the outside world, a sense of personal efficacy, openness to new educational and occupational aspirations, growth of opinion and readiness for social change Linkels and Smith (1974) share the same view about the theory.

Proponents of the theory are Ward Rustow, Daniel McClelland and Alex Linkels. The basic assumptions of the theory are:

- i. Interaction between developed and developing countries should be sustained to bring about greater development.
- ii. A high level of technical assistance is needed for development in developing countries.
- iii. Developing countries are to adopt the political structure and institutions of developed countries.
- iv. Developing countries should practice free and open economy where development countries can participate.

This study however objects to this school of thought and insists on the need for an alternative paradigm of development communication that takes into cognizance local initiatives.

Alternative Paradigm of Development Communication: The revised thinking

Scholars in this school of thought challenge the dominant theorists, calling for a development model that can accommodate the inherent peculiarities of developing countries. The paradigm sides with the limited effect theories of communication. In other words, the paradigm shift in communication led to a paradigm shift in development, leading to what is today known as the alternative paradigm of development communication. This paradigm puts accent on the people whom the change affects. Major theories in this paradigm are the self-reliance theory and participatory development theory.

Self-Reliance Theory

According to Anaeto et al (2010) the self-reliance theory posits that the path to sustainable development for third world countries is self-reliance. Self-reliance implies autonomy, allowing the people to determine their affairs and ways of development. Self-reliance is the ability of nations to face their problems with resources or ideas emanating from them, and to a great extent meeting these challenges without relying on external help. It dwells on self-help for the actualization of set goals.

Aso (2002) in Anaeto et al (2010) said self-reliance means that developing nations on their own are to maximize their available resources in their localities with little or no external intervention. They are to define development problems, set goals, devise strategies and make decisions independently and in line with their own social and cultural needs. The self-reliance theory has three strong propositions.

- i. The development of consciousness in people that they are in charge of their destiny.
- ii. That people can think or reason and achieve any height by themselves, and.
- iii. That people can acquire the attitude for solving problems that confront them by their own initiatives.

Participatory Theory of Development

Another alternative theory of development for developing countries, according to Anaeto et al (2010) is the participatory development model. This model posits that key to sustainable development is participation and involvement of beneficiaries. Paulo Freire and Boalo Augusto are among those who proposed this idea for development to take place; they argue that the people must be involved in the process.

According to Anaeto et al (2010), the participatory idea of development is premised on the fact that the common people are intelligent and can be active agents of change. Development is the people's capacity to contribute and participate actively in the task of transforming their society. Anaeto et al (2008) also adds that participation is necessary in order to share information, knowledge, trust, commitment and the right attitude in planning and implementing development programmes.

In summary, while other models and theories of development view development as something from the top trickling to the bottom, the participatory model places emphasis on the people evolving means that will bring about development for their own society. This research, therefore, disagrees and in strong terms with the dominant paradigm of modernization, arguing for the alternative paradigm of participation and self-reliance. The assumptions of the research are, therefore, hinged on the propositions of the participatory theory of development communication.

The Nature of CSDP and its Role in Poverty Alleviation in Taraba State

The community and social development project is a World Bank assisted programme aimed at accelerating poverty alleviation at the grassroots. According to Demola (2012), the programme which took off in Nigeria officially in 2009 is an offshoot of the Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Project (LEEMP), and the Community

based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP) The programme is collaboration between the World Bank and the Federal Government of Nigeria to promote poverty alleviation and grassroots development. To be a beneficiary of the scheme according to Marafa (2012), each state government is expected to pay a counterpart fund of one hundred million naira. This must be followed by the enactment of a law that will enable the full implementation of micro-projects by the agency across the state. So far, about 26 states across the Federation are beneficiaries of the scheme.

What interests a communication researcher to choose CSDP as a case study is the recognition by the agency of the importance of communication as a vital tool for its success. This is clearly exhibited by the drafting of a communication manual "Communication Strategy of the Community and Social Development Project" as a guide for her activities. The guide is modeled on the tenets of participatory communication.

Objectives of CSDP

The objectives of CSDP according to TACSDP project implementation manual are:

- i. To empower communities to plan, part finance, implement, monitor and maintain sustainable and socially inclusive multi sectoral micro projects.
- ii. To increase the capacity of local government areas, state and federal agencies to implement and monitor community driven development (CDD) policies and intervention.
- iii. Leverage federal, state and local government resources for greater coverage of community driven development (CDD) intervention in communities.

The CSDP's credo clearly demonstrates its zeal to work in line with the principles of participatory communication, the credo reads as follows:

- i. Goal: Poverty reduction
- ii. Mission: Community empowerment
- iii. Strategy: learning by doing
- iv. How go to the people, live with them, learn from them, plan with them, work with the start with what they know, build on what the know, teach by showing, learn by doing, not showcase but a pattern, not odds and ends but a system, not to conform but to transform, not relief but release.

The credo indicates that CSDP realizes the fact that development is people centered, involving people from the planning to implementation stages. According to Marafa (2012), CSDP projects cut across various aspects of human development such as physical infrastructure (roads, culverts, bridges, boreholes etc.), social infrastructure such as vocational training, health, rural market, schools etc., and a variety of environmental and natural resources management projects as well as safety net support assistance to vulnerable community members.

Method of Study

The study employs two basic design approaches to generate data for analysis: evaluative and descriptive design methods. Descriptive design according to Asemahet al(2012) seeks to collect data that would enable the researcher effectively analyze the key variables i.e the dependent and independent variables in the study. Evaluative design however according to Jen (2002) seeks to generate data that would enable the researcher ascertain the effectiveness or otherwise of a policy, scheme or programme.

Three principal instruments were used to gather the required data for the research: questionnaire and interview administered on a sample of 150 people randomly selected from CSDP host communities within Jalingo local government area, and a review of documented reports by CSDP from 2009-2012. The reason for the adoption of the eclectic approach to data collection is simple. Questionnaires were issued to community members who are literate or semi-literate; while interview was conducted on those who are not literate. Documented reports by CSDP serve as a backup to the primary data to enable us ascertain the contribution of the CSDP in the fight against poverty in Taraba State so far. This placed the researcher in a better position to appraise the role of participatory communication in poverty alleviation. The use of eclectic approach also helped to ensure the validity and reliability of the results.

Discussion of findings

The data provide evidence for us to see that the Community and Social Development Project has made impacts in the fight against poverty in Taraba State. More so, it has been discovered that the agency employed the principles of participatory communication in the planning and execution of micro projects in the poverty intervention struggle. A review of documented assessment of the agency's micro projects from 2009-2012 i.e in the first phase of implementation shows that scores of success stories have been recorded so far. Table 1 below presents the distribution of CSDP micro projects in the local government areas across Taraba State.

Table 1 Distribution of CSDP micro projects in the local government areas in Taraba State

LGA	Communities with CSDP projects
Ardo-kola	4
Bali	16
Donga	29
Gassol	11
Ibi	6
Jalingo	17
Karim-lamido	19
Kurmi	12
Lau	17
Sardauna	20
Takum	5
Wukari	11
Total	167

Source: TACS DP (2013) Summary of completed and ongoing micro project

It is clear from the table above that 167 communities in Taraba State have CSDP micro projects. These communities are mostly rural areas, characterized by severe lack and deprivation of the basic necessities of life such as safe drinking water, quality health facilities, and access to quality educational facilities, accessible roads among others. The disparity in the distribution of these micro projects arise as a result of delay from local government areas in inaugurating or constituting their various local government review committees to spearhead the planning and execution of micro projects at the local government level. Thus they were lagging behind during the first phase of implementation.

The various sectors that received priority in the CSDP intervention programme are highlighted in the table below.

Table 2 Sectoral distribution of CSDP projects

Sector	Completed MPs	Ongoing MPs	%
Water	80	0	36
Education	40	13	24
Health	28	0	13
Transportation	24	0	11
Rural electrification	2	1	2
Socio economic	24	5	13
Environmental and natural resources	3	1	2
Total	201	20	100

Source: TACSDP (2013) Summary of completed and ongoing project

Results from table 2 above shows that water received topmost priority compare to other sectors with 36% of the micro projects executed by the agency during the first phase of implementation. Education follows with 24% while health and the socio economic sector s have 13% each. Transport sector has 11% of the projects while rural electrification and the environment and natural resources have 2% each.

This distribution is in line with the development priorities of the people at the grassroots. In an in-depth interview, the Information and Protocol Officer of the agency in the state explained that projects to be executed were chosen based on balloting, where community members were partitioned along gender and age lines to vote for their desired projects. Thereafter, projects with the highest number of votes were considered as the priority of the people and thus qualified for execution.

Interviewees from the sampled population also attest to this fact that community members choose projects they wished executed in their respective communities. This shows that the agency employed the principles of participatory communication to carry community members along in planning and executing the micro projects in their communities. Questionnaire respondents provided a backup to this as shown in tables 3 and 4, where respondents commented on their involvement in the planning and execution of the projects in their communities.

Table 3 showing participation in the decision to carry out CSDP project in their communities

Response	frequency	percentage
Yes	107	89
No	13	11
Total	120	100

Source: Field survey 2014

Table 4 contribution of community members to the execution of projects in their communities

Response	frequency	percentage
Labour	60	50
Materials/working tools	24	20
Money	10	8
Supervisory/advisory roles	6	5
Security services	6	5
Others	8	7
None	6	5
Total	120	100

Source: Field survey 2014

It becomes clear that community members were actively involved in the process of carrying out the projects in their communities. 89% of respondents in table 3 participated in the decision to carry out the projects in their communities. With regard to participation in the execution process, only 5% did not participate. The remaining 95% contributed to the success of the projects various ways such as physical labour 50%, provision of materials/working tools 20%, money 8% (10% community contribution to the funding of the projects); supervisory/advisory roles and security services 5% each while 7% contributed in other aspects. It thus follows that community members were carried along in the planning and implementation of projects in their communities.

Respondents to both questionnaire and interview testify that the projects have impacted their lives positively in such areas as provision of social amenities closer to them, increment in their level of income, provision of employment opportunities; provision of skills for self-employment among others. Respondents applauded the communication approach which the agency employed to canvass for support and grassroots mobilization of community members to ensure the success of the projects. This they said helped to carry along everyone involved in the process to ensure the success of the projects. It thus becomes pertinent that for development programmes to achieve the desired results, local initiative must be respected. Participatory communication is however key to achieving this.

Conclusion

The Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) provides practical evidence for us to conclude that for grassroots development and poverty alleviation to be achieved in Nigeria, participatory communication must not be neglected. The first phase of projects in Taraba State have been completed and put to use by the end of 2012. Given the level of participation and involvement of beneficiaries in the projects, the research concludes that for the fight against the scourge of poverty bedeviling the country to be won, the people whom the programmes concern must be actively involved in the initiation/planning and implementation/execution of the projects.

This is contrary to the trickle down approach which the dominant paradigm of modernization advocates, but calls for a paradigm shift to the new paradigm of community empowerment through participation. Imoh (2013) also held a similar position. This participation paradigm must take into cognizance, an appropriate communication strategy that would carry along the people involved all through the project.

The needs and interests of community members must also be given priority for community development and poverty alleviation to be attained. This will help to minimize the number of useless/redundant projects that have no impact in the lives of community members. In our contemporary Nigeria, several projects have been completed but are not useful or relevant to the people. To this end, the interest of beneficiaries must be considered in carrying out development projects. Here, development planners are expected to facilitate dialogue that would help community members identify their problems and the possible solutions, not to decide for them what their needs are.

The central argument in this essay is simple: participatory communication if effectively harnessed and utilized will help to mobilize and spur community members to action so as to be supportive to community development projects. This will go a long way to speed up the implementation process thereby increasing the efficiency of the projects to help actualize the dream of poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In line with the argument above, the study recommends that; (1) poverty alleviation programmes should take into consideration the needs and interests of beneficiaries. Beneficiaries should be actively involved in the initiation/planning, implementation/execution and monitoring/evaluation of projects. The trickle-down approach to programme design is hereby debunked in strong terms, advocating for the participatory approach to poverty alleviation.

(2) In this regard, the role of the development communicator will be to spur the people at the grassroots and facilitate dialogue among them so that they can brainstorm and come up with possible solutions to their problems. Thus development has been reduced to a participatory process, instead of something coming from above. This can only be achieved by evolving a participatory communication strategy to complement poverty alleviation programmes.

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